STREET & SMITH'S

Western Story

JUNE 20, 1931

Magazine

EVERY WEEK

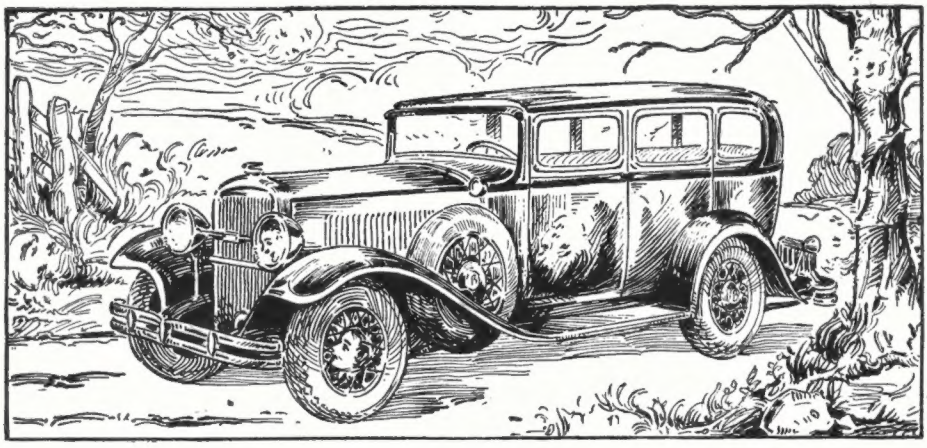
15¢
20¢ IN CANADA

MAX BRAND
E.C. LINCOLN
ROBERT J. HORTON
ROBERT
ORMOND CASE
and Others

A
COWBOY'S DAY
(24)
SLIM AND RITA
WATCH THE ROUND-UP

Win $3,700.00

OR BUICK 8 SEDAN AND $2,500 IN CASH



Can you find 5 faces in the picture?

Sensational money-making opportunity for everybody! You may win $3,700 if you prefer all cash or handsome latest model Buick 8 Sedan and $2,500 in cash. **This offer is made by a prominent business house for advertising purposes. Someone is going to win $3,700—why not you?**

I want to send you this prize. Act quick! Send your answer today and qualify to win.

All you do to qualify for an opportunity in this great cash prize advertising plan is to find five faces in picture.

People riding in the auto above got out of the car. Their faces are shown in odd places about the picture. Some faces are upside down, others look sideways, some look straight at you. If you can pick out 5 or more faces, mark them, clip the picture and send to me together with your name and address. Sharp eyes will find them. Can you?

Easy to Win - $12,960 in 103 Cash Prizes

We will give away $12,960 in cash. You are sure to profit if you take an active part. In case of ties duplicate prizes will be given. You get $3,700 if you win grand first prize. In addition there are 102 other wonderful cash prizes. Grand second prize $1,000 in cash. Grand third prize $500 in cash. Also four other prizes of $500.00 each and many others. All told $12,960 in cash. Money to pay you is already on deposit in the Mercantile Trust and Savings Bank, a big Chicago bank.

SEND NO MONEY

The main thing is—send in your answer today. You can share in this advertising cash distribution. Hurry! and take no chance of losing the extra reward of $1,000 for promptness if you win grand first prize. Act now! You don't need to send a penny of your money to win! Just find five faces in the picture above and mail with coupon at once for particulars.

$1,000.00 for Promptness

Send your answer at once. Make sure to qualify for $1,000 extra given for promptness if you win the Buick Sedan —a total of $3,700 if you prefer all cash.

Send Coupon Today

THOMAS LEE, Mgr.
427 W. Randolph St., Dept. 48, Chicago, Ill.

I have found five faces in the $3,700.00 prize picture and am anxious to win a prize. Please advise me how I stand.

Name.....

Address.....

Town.....State.....

Indiana Farmer Wins $3,500!

This is a picture of Mr. C. H. Essig, Argos, Ind., taken on his farm. He writes: "Wish to acknowledge receipt of your $3,500 prize check. Oh, boy! This is the biggest sum of money I ever had in my hands. It is indeed a fortune to me."

Hundreds have been rewarded in our past advertising campaigns. Mrs. Edna D. Ziler, of Kentucky, won $1,950. Miss Tillie Bohle, of Iowa, $1,500. Be Prompt! Answer today!

WHAT *will you be doing*

ONE YEAR *from today?*

THREE hundred and sixty-five days from now — what?

Will you still be struggling along in the same old job at the same old salary — worried about the future — never quite able to make both ends meet?

One year from today will you still be putting off your start toward success — thrilled with ambition one moment and then cold the next — delaying, waiting, fiddling away the precious hours that will never come again?

Don't do it, man — don't do it.

There is no greater tragedy in the world than that of a man who stays in the rut all his life, when with just a little effort he could advance.

Make up your mind today that you're going to train yourself to do some one thing well. Choose the work you like best in the list below, mark an X beside it, and without cost or obligation, at least get the full story of what the I. C. S. can do for you.

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS
"The Universal University"
Box 4910-C, Scranton, Penna.

Without cost or obligation, please send me a copy of your booklet, "Who Wins and Why," and full particulars about the subject *before* which I have marked X:

TECHNICAL AND INDUSTRIAL COURSES

☐ Architect	☐ Machinist	☐ Marine Engineer
☐ Architectural Draftsman	☐ Reading Shop Blueprints	☐ Refrigeration
☐ Building Estimating	☐ Civil Engineer	☐ R. R. Locomotives
☐ Wood Millworking	☐ Highway Engineering	☐ Air Brakes
☐ Concrete Builder	☐ Surveying and Mapping	☐ Train Operation
☐ Contractor and Builder	☐ Gas Engines	☐ R. R. Section Foreman
☐ Structural Draftsman	☐ Toolmaker	☐ R. R. Bridge and Building Foreman
☐ Structural Engineer	☐ Diesel Engines	☐ Chemistry ☐ Pharmacy
☐ Electrical Engineer	☐ Aviation Engines	☐ Coal Mining Engineer
☐ Electric Wiring	☐ Bridge Engineer	☐ Navigation
☐ Electric Lighting	☐ Automobile Work	☐ Agriculture
☐ Welding, Electric and Gas	☐ Plumbing	☐ Textile Overseer or Superintendent
☐ Telegraph Engineer	☐ Steam Fitting	☐ Cotton Manufacturing
☐ Telephone Work	☐ Heating	☐ Woolen Manufacturing
☐ Mechanical Engineer	☐ Ventilation	☐ Fruit Growing
☐ Mechanical Draftsman	☐ Sanitary Engineer	☐ Radio
☐ Patternmaker	☐ Sheet Metal Worker	☐ Poultry Farming
	☐ Steam Engineer	

BUSINESS TRAINING COURSES

☐ Business Management	☐ Spanish ☐ French	☐ Signs
☐ Industrial Management	☐ Salesmanship	☐ Civil Service
☐ Personnel Management	☐ Advertising	☐ Railway Mail Clerk
☐ Traffic Management	☐ Business Correspondence	☐ Mail Carrier
☐ Accountancy	☐ Lettering Show Cards	☐ Grade School Subjects
☐ Cost Accountant	☐ Stenography and Typing	☐ High School Subjects
☐ C. P. Accountant	☐ Complete Commercial	☐ Illustrating
☐ Bookkeeping	☐ English	☐ Cartooning
☐ Secretarial Work		☐ Lumber Dealer

Name..... Age.....

Street Address.....

City..... State.....

Occupation.....

If you reside in Canada, send this coupon to the International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada

STREET & SMITH'S

WESTERN STORY

MAGAZINE

Title Registered U. S. Patent Office.

EVERY WEEK

Yearly Subscription, $6.00 Six Months, $3.00 Single Copies, 15 Cents

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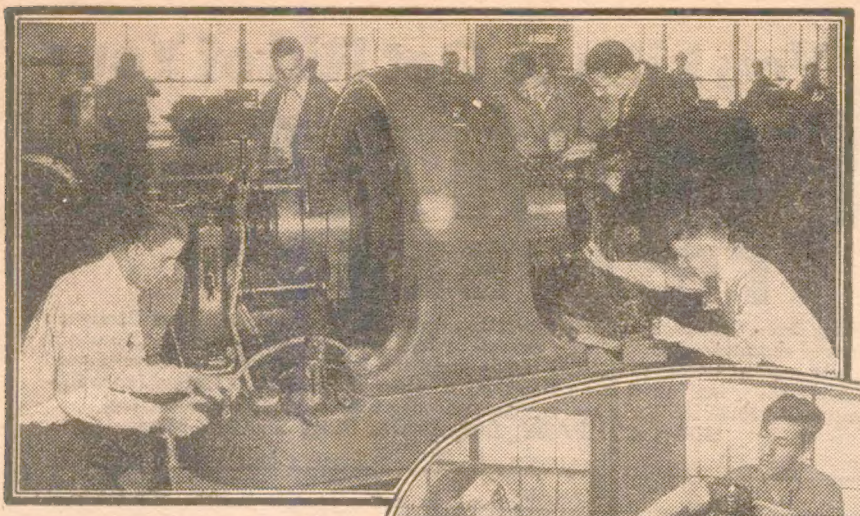

Coyne students getting actual experience on one of my big synchronous converters!

One of my Instructors explaining the operation of a radial airplane engine.

A BIG PAY JOB for YOU in ELECTRICITY

Don't spend your life in a dull, hopeless job! Don't be satisfied with a mere $30.00 or $40.00 a week! You don't have to! Electricity pays salaries of $60.00, $70.00 and even $200.00 a week to thousands of fellows no smarter than you.

Learn Without Lessons in 90 Days

In the Great Shops of Coyne

Come to Coyne at Chicago and learn Electricity in 90 days—not by correspondence, but by actual electrical work—on huge motors and generators, switchboards, power plants, substations, auto and airplane engines, armatures, etc. You don't need advanced education or previous experience. Coyne has been placing men in Big Pay Electrical Jobs since 1899. Let Coyne help YOU to a good electrical position.

JOBS PAYING $60 to $200 a week

Power Plant Operator	$50 to $70 a wk.
Maintenance Engineer	60 to 100 a wk.
Armature Winding . .	45 to 75 a wk.
Illumination Expert .	50 to 80 a wk.
Radio Service Expert	50 to 100 a wk.
Aviation Ignition . . .	60 to 125 a wk.
Battery Expert	70 to 200 a wk.
Auto Electrician . . .	75 to 200 a wk.
Contractor-Dealer . .	60 to 300 a wk.
Signal Engineering . .	50 to 100 a wk.

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Don't worry about a job! My Employment Department gives you a FREE lifetime service. And if you need part-time work while at school to help pay expenses, we'll gladly help you get it. MAIL COUPON FOR FREE PROOF THAT YOU CAN HAVE A GOOD ELECTRICAL JOB IN 90 DAYS! Get my Big Free Electrical Book—FREE Radio and Auto Electrical offers. Find out about my special low tuition price. THIS DOES NOT OBLIGATE YOU IN ANY WAY. JUST MAIL THE COUPON!

COYNE Electrical SCHOOL
H. C. LEWIS, Pres. Founded 1899
500 S. Paulina Street, Dept. A1-45, Chicago, Illinois

FREE ELECTRICAL BOOK Coupon

H. C. LEWIS, President
Coyne Electrical School, Dept. A1-45
500 S. Paulina St., Chicago, Ill.
Gentlemen: Please send me your big Free Electrical Book with 151 illustrations. This does not obligate me.

Name.....

Address.....

City.....*State*.....

Would You Like to Get Rid of Your STOMACH TROUBLE?

If you are suffering from Stomach Ulcers, Gastritis, Acidosis, Indigestion, Sour Stomach or any other form of stomach disturbances caused by hyperacidity or faulty diet, tear out this advertisement and send it AT ONCE, with your name and address. We will send you, FREE OF CHARGE, an interesting booklet, amazing testimonial letters from former sufferers and a $1,000.00 REWARD offer guaranteeing the truth of these letters.

UDGA COMPANY, 1008 Dakota Bldg., St. Paul, Minn.

My name is.....

My address is.....

City and State.....

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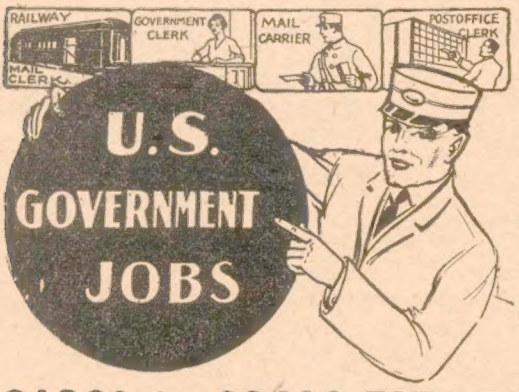
PROTECT BY COPYRIGHT the plot of your story for the talkies, etc., against literary piracy! Full copyright protection at Washington and registration obtained for you at Library of Congress, Washington, D. C. Criticism, development, revision. Send for free booklet. Write today!

Daniel O'Malley Co., Inc., Suite 3, 1776 Broadway, N. Y.



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Common Education usually sufficient

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COUPON

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ROCHESTER, N. Y.

Gentlemen: Rush to me, FREE of charge, list of U. S. Government big pay positions now obtainable. Send me FREE 32-page book describing salaries, hours, work, vacation and giving full particulars on how to get a position.

Name .....

Address .....

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I have an honest proven treatment for sterility due to functional weakness which I have used with wonderful success in thousands of cases. It is the result of 35 years experience and has been praised in the highest terms by hundreds of married women, childless for years, who became happy mothers. If you will send me your name and address I will gladly send you a treatment and a copy of my booklet, "A Baby in Your Home," which tells how to use it and many other things married women should know. Both will be sent free in plain wrapper. Write today.

Dr. H. Will Elders, Suite 265-F
7th & Felix, St. Joseph, Missouri

LADIES

I positively guarantee my great successful "Relief Compound." Safely relieves some of the longest, stubborn and unusual cases in three to five days.

FOR OVER A QUARTER OF A CENTURY women from all over the country have used this compound with remarkable results. Testimonials without number. No harm, pain or interference with work. Mail, $2. Double strength, $3. Booklet Free. Write today.

DR. D. P. SOUTHINGTON REMEDY CO., KANSAS CITY, MO.

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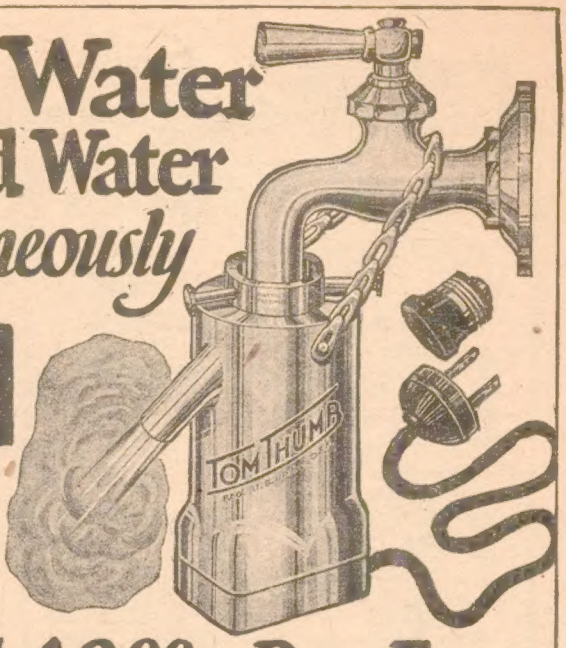
Ask for the New EVEREDY GEAR TOP CAPPER

A REAL he-man capper. Massive post. Big handle. Powerful leverage. Insert crown in new "Hold-Cap" throat and it stays, leaving both hands free to finish capping. Spring raises handle after bottle is crowned. Patented *double seal* feature ends spoiled beverages. Caps all sizes up to quart. If your bottling supply or hardware dealer can't supply you, we'll ship direct. Write your name and address in the margin of this ad and send with $2.00 to The Everedy Co., 12 East Street, Frederick, Md. Satisfaction guaranteed or money refunded.

Running Hot Water From Your Cold Water Faucet *Instantaneously*



Only $3.75 Complete

Agents! This Marvelous Invention Will Make Up to $40.00 a Day Easy

Just plug in at the nearest electric outlet and presto!—you have instantaneous, continuous running hot water from your cold water faucet. This tells you in a nutshell why the invention of the Tom Thumb automatic electric hot water heater will make it easy for you to make up to $40.00 a day.

The electric heated steaming hot water comes direct from the faucet instantaneously—yes, as quickly as you can turn on the current and the hot water runs indefinitely until you shut off the electricity. The cost is small—convenience is great. Useful wherever hot water is needed—no fuss or bother—attached to any faucet in a jiffy. Works on either AC or DC current. You and your customers will marvel and be delighted at this new discovery of electrical science. The small cost of $3.75 for the Tom Thumb, Junior (110 volts) or $5.75 for Tom Thumb, Senior (220 volts) does the work of any expensive hot water heating equipment costing several hundred dollars—the Tom Thumb absolutely eliminates the plumber or any other additional expense.

No Installation - Stick One On Faucet and Sale Is Made

Think of it! no installation, no extra expense—nothing else to do but to stick it on the faucet, turn on electricity and it is there ready for duty. Easily removed when not wanted and easily carried to any part of house where cold water is running and hot water is wanted. Has many uses—too numerable to mention here. Weighs only 1 lb., made entirely of aluminum. Cannot rust, no moving parts, nothing to get out of order.

If $40 A Day Sounds Good To You Rush Coupon

This new scientific invention offers tremendous sales possibilities. At the low price of $3.75 you should be able to sell at least forty a day. You pocket $1.00 cash commission on every sale. If you would like to know all about this proposition, sign your name and address to coupon or, better still, get started selling at once. Attach money order for $2.75 to coupon and rush to us. We will send complete selling outfit containing 1 Tom Thumb electric hot water heater, order blanks, selling particulars and everything necessary to help you get started making up to $40.00 a day at once.

Terminal Products Co., Inc.
Dept. 1506, 200 Hudson St.,
New York, N. Y.

The Tom Thumb electric hot water heater looks like a big money maker to me. I am sure interested in knowing how to make up to $40.00 a day with this proposition. I have checked below the proposition I am interested in at this moment.

☐ Enclosed find money order for $2.75. Please send me one Tom Thumb Junior, order blanks and selling information. It is understood upon receipt of this sample outfit I will be permitted to take orders and collect $1.00 cash deposit for every Tom Thumb, Jr. I sell, or $1.50 for every Tom Thumb, Sr. I sell. It is understood I will send the orders to you and you will ship direct to my customers C.O.D. for the balance.

☐ I would like to have additional information before acting as one of your agents. Please send this by return mail free of obligation.

Name .....

Street .....

City ..... State .....

If you live outside of the United States, price is $1.00 extra on each unit, cash with order.

Get Strong!

Eight Improved Muscle Builders

All for $2.98

Easily master feats which now seem difficult. If you want physical culture for health this equipment is what you need. SAVE AT LEAST HALF! We furnish ten cable chest expander adjustable to 200 lbs. resistance. Made of new live extra strength rubber to give resistance needed for sure muscle development. Pair of patented hand grips develop powerful grip and arm. Wall exercising parts develop back, arms and legs. Head strap permits exercise of neck muscles. Develop leg muscles with foot strap—gives speed, endurance. Illustrated course shows how to develop any part of body.

GUARANTEE
Entire satisfaction guaranteed or money back.

SEND NO MONEY

Send name and address! We send all by return mail. Pay postman $2.98 plus postage. (If you live outside U. S. A. price $3.95 cash with order.)

CRUSADER APP. CO., Dept. 3302
Maplewood, N. J.

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The School That Has Trained Over 1,100 C. P. A.'s

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Pays Immense Profits

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200% Profit! Hudson made $75.00 in 15-minute sale to large Company for telephones. We furnish proof.

H. M. Hay says "Out of hundreds of Neverknots left on trial have had only two returns. I sold over 30 to one bank."

NEW KIND OF CORD SET FREE

Every Neverknot Salesman is given free the beautiful De Luxe Neverknot Cord Set (with only Unbreakable Switch Plug of its kind in the World) which automatically coils itself out of the way, prevents scorching and saves electric bills. Every woman buys instantly for it saves its own cost in electricity. It's brand new and yours free if you work for us.

Good Housekeeping Institute

New Off'n On Plug Saves Electric Bills

Important! There is only one Neverknot. Write this Company for exclusive territory, special prices and big free offer.

NEVERKNOT CO., Dept. 6-L, 4503 Ravenswood, Chicago

NO MORE BIG TIRE BILLS!

GOODYEAR · FISK · Firestone · U.S. AND OTHER TIRES

At ¼ Regular Prices

Tires You Know and Prefer AT NEW LOW PRICES!

You can rely upon Chicago's oldest and most reliable rubber company to deliver tire mileage at lowest cost. Actual tests on the worst roads in the country prove that our standard brand, reconstructed tires deliver 60 to 60 per cent more service. A trial order will convince you.

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BALLOON Tires			Reg. CORD Tires		
Size Rim	Tires	Tubes	Size	Tires	Tubes
29x4.40-21"	$2.30	$1.10	30x3	$2.20	$1.00
29x4.50-20"	2.40	1.15	30x3½	2.25	1.00
30x4.50-21"	2.45	1.20	32x3½	2.70	1.15
28x4.75-19"	2.45	1.20	31x4	2.95	1.15
30x4.95-21"	2.90	1.35	32x4	2.95	1.15
30x5.00-20"	2.95	1.35	33x4	2.95	1.15
28x5.25-18"	2.95	1.35	34x4	3.80	1.15
30x5.25-20"	2.95	1.35	32x4½	3.20	1.45
31x5.25-21"	2.20	1.35	33x4½	3.20	1.45
30x5.77-20"	3.20	1.40	34x4½	3.45	1.45
31x6.00-19"	3.20	1.40	30x5	3.60	1.75
32x6.00-20"	3.20	1.40	33x5	3.60	1.75
33x6.00-21"	3.20	1.45	35x5	4.45	1.75
32x6.20-20"	3.65	1.75	All Other Sizes		

DEALERS WANTED

All Tubes New—Guaranteed First Quality

Send only $1.00 deposit with each tire ordered, balance C. O. D. If you send cash in full deduct 5 per cent. You are guaranteed a year's service or replacement at half price.

MIDLAND TIRE & RUBBER COMPANY
Dept. 17-G, 1000-10 W. Sixty-Third Street Chicago

PICTURE PLAY

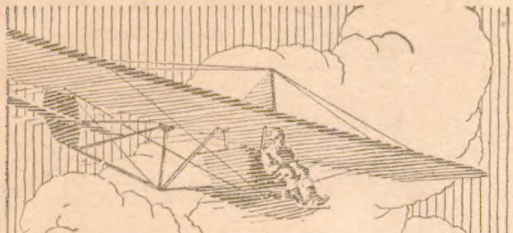
The most interesting magazine of the screen

NOW TEN CENTS

For sale at your news dealer

Sore burning feet eased in 3 seconds

FOR easy, 3-second relief from tired, aching, burning feet—gently rub in a little Coolene, the new ivory-white, vanishing foot cream. Its healing, penetrating oils and unguents quickly get right down to the inflamed nerves and tissues—draw out the torturous soreness and burning—and bring new, cool, all-day foot comfort. Cannot stain stockings or bed clothing. Get Coolene today at your druggist.



GLIDER *of the* HIGHWAY!

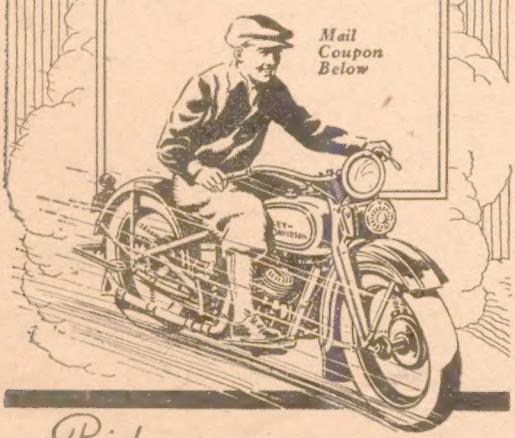
SOARING down the roads — effortless — silent — smooth — the Harley-Davidson is a true Glider of the Highway. It responds instantly to every whim — answers every sway of your body.

Give the throttle a twist and instantly your Twin becomes a brute of a thing — pulsing with power — eager to snort over hills, or race down a straightaway. That's motorcycling—sport of a thousand thrills!

So inexpensive, too. A Harley-Davidson costs little to buy—almost nothing to run.

Let your Dealer show you the 1931 Twins, Single, and Sidecars. Ask about his Pay-As-You-Ride Plan

Mail Coupon Below



Ride a HARLEY-DAVIDSON

MAIL THE COUPON

HARLEY-DAVIDSON MOTOR CO.
Dept. S.S., Milwaukee, Wis.
Interested in your motorcycles. Send literature.

Name _____

Address _____
My age is ( ) 16-19 years, ( ) 20-30 years, ( ) 31 years and up, ( ) under 16 years. Check your age group.

Get Groceries at Wholesale

AND A WONDERFUL CHANCE TO MAKE

$15 a Day *Besides!*

Yes, right now, I'll give you groceries at rock-bottom, wholesale prices and a wonderful chance to pocket $10 to $15 cash profits in a day. If you want proof of this, I'll tell you about Van Allen, of Illinois, who reports profits as high as $125 in a week. Gustav Karnath, a farm laborer in Minnesota, writes, "Made $20.35 the first 5 hours." Mrs. B. L. Hodges, of New York, says she never fails to make $18 to $20 a day. Of course some make more than others. But these big earnings of a few of my Representatives show you the wonderful opportunities. And today I offer you an *even greater* proposition than I gave these people. Give me a chance to prove it!

Big Profits for Pleasant Work

I am President of an old-established, million-dollar manufacturing company. We distribute high-quality Groceries and other Household Necessities direct from factory to user through Authorized Local Representatives. We have thousands of customers in every State. Last year our Representatives made nearly *two million dollars!* Now I invite you to share in these big profits. And I will give you Groceries and other Household Supplies *at savings of nearly one-half!* Thus you have a wonderful chance to *make* and *save* big money.

No Capital or Experience Needed

You positively don't need any capital or experience. No course of training is required. All you do is call on your friends and my established customers in your territory and take care of their orders. I never sell through stores. **You alone get the profit on all orders from these customers.** If you wish, you may keep your present job and start with me in spare time. Oscar Stuart, of West Virginia, reports $18 profit in 2½ hours' spare time. Mrs. K. R. Roof, of South Carolina, made over $50 the first week in spare time. This shows the tremendous possibilities.

FREE! New Ford Tudor Sedan

NOT a contest. I offer a brand-new car free to producers as an extra reward or bonus—in addition to their large cash profits. Mail coupon for particulars.

Send No Money

If you want to get groceries at our rock-bottom, wholesale prices —and a chance to make $10 to $15 in a day besides—send me your name and address at once. Don't miss this wonderful opportunity. Let me give you full details of my amazing new plan without cost or obligation. I'll give you the big opportunity you've long been waiting for. So don't lose a moment. Mail the coupon today sure!

MAIL THIS NOW!

Albert Mills, Pres., American Products Co.,
7598 Monmouth Ave., Cincinnati, Ohio.

Send me, without cost or obligation, all the facts about your new proposition that offers **Groceries at Wholesale** and a chance to make $10 to $15 in a day besides. Also explain your FREE Ford Offer.

Name.....

Address.....

© A. P. CO. (Print or Write Plainly)

Don't say "learning music is hard"

...until you've sent for our FREE demonstration lesson

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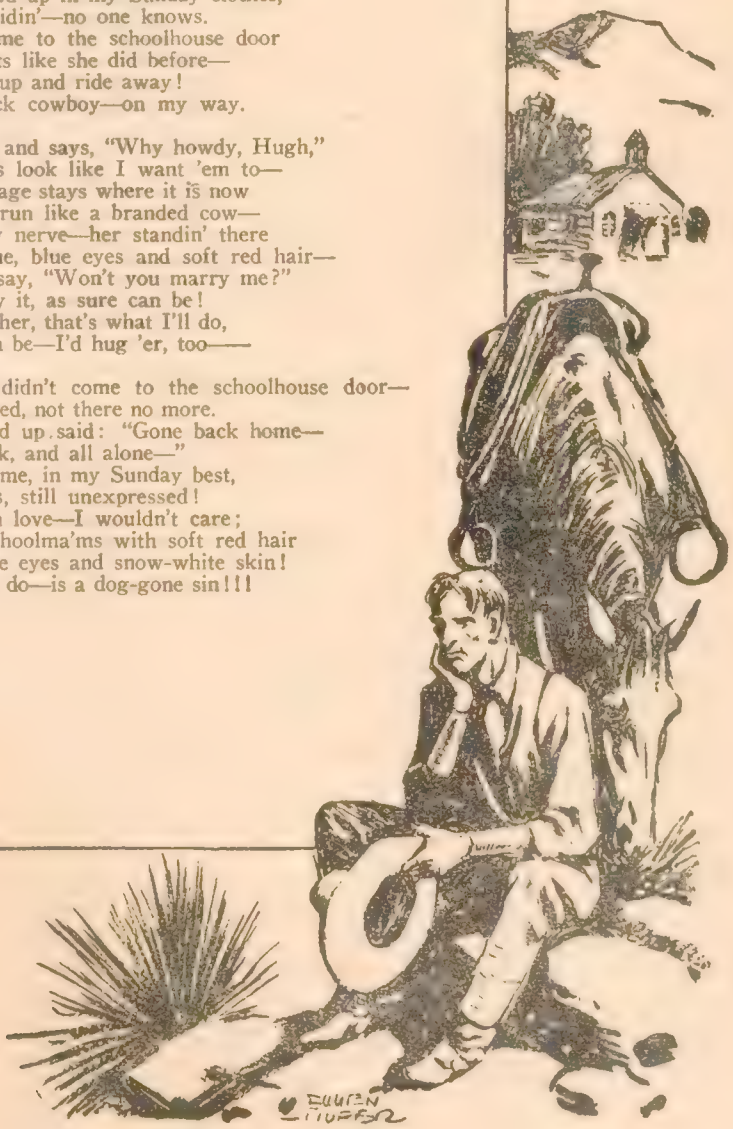
A COWBOY'S LOVE

By CAROLYN WINTERS

I'M a lovesick cowboy, but I don't care
For our new schoolma'am has red hair
And eyes as blue as indigo,
And skin like milk or winter snow.
I'm all dressed up in my Sunday clothes,
Where I'm ridin'—no one knows.
But—if I come to the schoolhouse door
And *she* looks like she did before—
I'll grab her up and ride away!
I'm a lovesick cowboy—on my way.

If she smiles and says, "Why howdy, Hugh,"
And her eyes look like I want 'em to—
And my courage stays where it is now
And I don't run like a branded cow—
If I keep my nerve—her standin' there
With her blue, blue eyes and soft red hair—
I'm goin' to say, "Won't you marry me?"
Yes! I'll say it, as sure can be!
And I'll kiss her, that's what I'll do,
It might even be—I'd hug 'er, too——

Well! She didn't come to the schoolhouse door—
Place all locked, not there no more.
A note pinned up said: "Gone back home—
"Husband sick, and all alone—"
Now look at me, in my Sunday best,
Full of words, still unexpressed!
If I wasn't in love—I wouldn't care;
But I hate schoolma'ms with soft red hair
And blue, blue eyes and snow-white skin!
The way they do—is a dog-gone sin!!!



THE GOOD TRADER

By

ROBERT ORMOND CASE

Author of "Sheriff's Choice," etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE WORM TURNS.

AT three o'clock of a sweltering afternoon, the main street of Lodgepole dozed. Lethargy was the spirit abroad in the land. Horses slumbered at hitching rails, hip bones pointing toward the flawless sky. Shirt-sleeved proprietors leaned against the doorways of their respective emporiums, yawning. Certain ranks of those who appeared not to toil or spin and yet were obviously no lilies of the field, leaned on uptilted chairs on the shady side of the street, or sprawled on battle-scarred benches, whittling.

Among these latter was Pete Hanley, a gaunt youth of melancholy appearance. Having arrived in town too late to secure an elevated place among the restful ones, he sat on the sidewalk, his back to the weather-beaten façade of the Lodgepole Livery & Feed Barn, Rates Reasonable.

The youthful Mr. Hanley, whose somewhat harsh features were enlivened by mild, unwinking, rather quizzical blue eyes, was known locally to be something of a trader. Evidence of this inner shrewdness became apparent at train time, or approximately five minutes past three. As the hoarse whistle of the approaching monster re-echoed up the draw, Main Street bestirred itself, yawned, and repaired to the depot. But Mr. Hanley remained behind. When others to his right and left had departed, he arose, selected the most comfortable of the rawhide-bottomed chairs thus vacated, lowered thereon a section of his anatomy approximating his shoulder blades and sighed profoundly.

Lafe Potts, boyhood crony, and assistant proprietor of the feed barn, was the first to return from the depot some minutes after the clanking echoes of the train had died in the shimmering distance.

Taking note of the swift pace with

which the usually phlegmatic one was bearing down upon him, Pete's first conclusion was that Lafe was likewise intent upon securing a choice seat. But it immediately became apparent that an urge of more importance had sent his friend hurrying back in advance of the crowd.

Lafe lowered himself into the chair alongside, mopped his face on a very large and exceedingly red bandanna and spoke in apologetic vein.

"Pete, I shorely hate to throw a monkey wrench into yore genial mood, just when you figger to be setting pretty. But grief got off the train. After sizing it up, I loped back pronto to give you a chance to make medicine."

"Yeah?"

"You thought you was shet of yore haywire brother, Clyde, when he vamosed a couple weeks ago. First breathing spell you've had in years, huh? Well, sir, it looks like you got to take up the white man's burden again. Clyde's flew the coop, all right. But his skullduggery goes marching on."

"Sho," said Pete. His long fingers explored the breast pocket of his hickory shirt, drew forth the makings. "How come?"

"Some folks from the valley got off the train," said Lafe. "You'll see 'em pretty pronto, now, strolling down the boolevard. A feller and his wife and a gal. Name of Perkins. Hiram Perkins. And Missus Perkins. And Phoebe."

PETE lighted his cigarette and tossed the match away. He squinted at his companion with mild interest. "Phoebe," he murmured. "Now there's a pretty name. Phoebe, huh?"

"She's easy to look at, also," conceded Lafe. "Rosy-cheeked and healthy as clover. Looks you in the eye trusting and straightforward like that. Like every gent she meets is one of them knights in shining armor until proved otherwise. Her paw's a short-coupled, squatty feller with a bay window. Puffs plenty and hopes for the best. Missus Perkins is one of them ga'nt, hoss-faced ladies who figgers that whichever way you go from here it's worse. Good citizens, you savvy. But Phoebe's ondoubtedly the king-pin of the family."

"They ain't strangers no more," said Pete, grinning. "You got a knack of describing folks, Lafe. That's them approaching with the herd now, huh? Toting their valises with 'em. Looks like they're turning in at the cafay. Prob'ly ain't et on the train. You're right, Lafe. You're ondoubtedly an expert at appraising gals on the hoof. That there Phoebe would cast a shadow even on a rainy day. But continue, ol' son. How come you picked up all this world information on such short notice is one of them mysterious things."

"They busted up to me joyful and

confiding," Lafe explained, "to make inquiry as to how to get around and where the town was. Pleased as hobos in a pie house, the three of 'em. Paw's puffing, maw's looking dang near human and the gal smiling. Pop-eyed like that, at the sunshine and the great open spaces they could see from the depot.

"In no time a-tall they broke down and confessed that they'd done traded their grocery store down in the valley and most of their worldly goods to boot, for a section of A-1 land up here near Lodgepole. Yodeled happily about what a great country this was, and how they was fed up on the valley and wanted to get up here in the cow country and raise alfalfa and calves and hawgs. The air's like wine, they says; and is the sky always so blue? They was referring, you savvy, to this flea-bitten wilderness." He mopped his face anew. "Dog-gone, it was pitiful."

"You're one of them community boosters," accused Pete, yawning. "But you ain't told me nothing yet, Lafe. Outside of feeling sorry for the Perkins family, and particularly for Phoebe, where's the grief?"

"I'm sneaking up on it," said Lafe. "This is it. The gent to whom they gave title to their grocery store, and their home down in the valley plus all the loose cash they could lay hands on in exchange for a section of land up here in this great wonderful desert—sight unseen—was a fine, noble, upstanding, trustworthy lad named Clyde Hanley."

"No!" said Pete. He sat more erect in his chair, shaken from his lethargic mood, and peered at Lafe. Momentarily the quizzical gleam in his mild eyes became more metallic, more hard. "Sho, now! All the land Clyde's got left is the Foul Springs section. It wouldn't support a jack rabbit. Shorely to goodness he wouldn't turn them benighted valley pilgrims loose on that blistering aggregation of rim rock and greasewood?"

"Sight unseen," Lafe insisted. "But you ain't heard the half of it, Pete. Not only has he given 'em title to Foul Springs, but listen to his description of it. A good, substantial log house on it, you savvy. And a barn and corrals. An old orchard and a windmill. Eighty acres of bottom land beside the creek, all in alfalfa. Sub-irrigated. A couple of hundred more in tules and brush that can be cleared away easy." He shrugged his shoulders in a significant gesture.

A SLOW flush darkened Pete's lean face. "Dog-gone! For purposes of embarrassing me, he's done described my Willow Creek section, which is smack alongside of Foul Springs. He's banking, by gravy, that I'll ante up once more to protect the family name and keep him out of the pen. Somehow or another I'll prevent these said pilgrims from gunning for him in the courts when they discover he's stolen their eye teeth. Yeah, good ol' brother Pete'll see him through as usual. Lafe, how long have I got to cover that maverick's trail?"

"Now you're makin' talk," Lafe approved. "You been paying Clyde's amusement tax for five years, and what has it bought you? Most folks hereabouts don't know the insides of the picture, but I do. Take a look at it once and leave the ol' hackles r'ar up. You and Clyde was left the Double O, half and half. Forty sections of deeded land and a hundred more of range under lease. Six thousand head of cows. It was a noble start in any man's language. Both of you gents of substance. Pulling together, you would have had the world by the tail. 'Hanley Brothers, proprietors of the Double O.' That's what yore paw dreamed about. And yore maw. Before they cashed in. It was yore haywire dream, also.

"And what happens? Right away, before yore parents has had a chance to rest easy in their graves, Clyde begins

to waste his substance in riotous living. You had to buy his half of the herd to protect yoreself. Yeah, at better than the market. Then he starts mortgaging his land, and you got to buy up them mortgages to hold the ranch together. All but Foul Springs, which he can't borrow on, it being worthless.

"When his herd's gone and all his land that's worth a plugged nickel, he starts writing notes. You pay 'em when folks come hollering, and when his notes don't draw water no more, he turns loose a flock of haywire checks. You likewise pay them, patient and hopeful as a blasted ox. Yeah, and when everything else fails, he signs yore name to a check for a thousand iron men. And danged if you don't pay that!

"I tell you, Pete, it's been a spectacle to make tears stream from the eyes of a bald-faced bull. It's awful. You been trying to straighten him out and he's been playing you for a wall-eyed pike all the while, laughing up his sleeve. The time's come to grasp that gilded sharp by the face and make him snap like a whip!"

"I believe you're right," agreed Pete, absently. It was plain that he had been following the other's heated monologue only at a distance. The flush had receded from his gaunt features. When he looked at Lafe now, grinning, his eyes were quizzical as of old. "Yeah, I reckon that as far as me and Clyde's concerned, that said eleventh hour struck about an even hour ago. Ol' son, when did them pilgrims figger on sashaying forth to inspect their said Promised Land?"

"Muy pronto," said Lafe. "As soon as they've et. They asked me to have a rig ready."

"Tain't necessary," said Pete. "I don't aim to cut into yore business, you savvy. But it so happens that I drove in with the ol' surrey this afternoon. To fetch back supplies to the ranch. Those said supplies can wait. I'll drive them pilgrims out."

"Ho!" chortled Lafe, mopping his face with glee. "The ol' worm's turned. Rose up from the humble dust, by gravy, armed with fangs and a rattle. Don't I know the signs? You're going to personally escort the Perkins family out to Foul Springs. You're going to observe 'em pass out in unison when they see that jack-rabbits' training ground for which they traded all their worldly goods. And then what?"

Though they spoke with heads together, so that restful ones who had blossomed anew to right and left would not overhear their words, Pete lowered his voice still further.

"When they find they've been swindled and start yelling for gore," he said, "I aim to back their play to get Clyde's scalp. That lad needs a lesson in world affairs. But to make him easy to reach, he'd ought to be back here on the ground. Not suspectin' nothing, you savvy. Figgering he's settin' pretty."

"Yeah, but how?" questioned Lafe. "He's ondoubtedly sold the store and the Perkins home down in the valley to the highest bidder, cashed in and made tracks. He's prob'ly in Frisco right this minnit, oiling the hinges of the Golden Gate."

"But he'd rather cut a swath right here in Lodgepole," Pete pointed out, "giving me the horse laugh at the same time. And here's how we'll fetch him back. He's always been thick with that white-faced tinhorn over to the Ten Strike. Just you ease over there after I've left town with the Perkinses and holler yore head off about what a horse collar I am. You're known to be a friend of mine, you savvy, and you hate Clyde's shadow. Therefore you're all burned up. I've done confided in you that I aim to take care of these pilgrims which Clyde has gouged, instead of leaving the maverick face the music. In other words, I'm paying the tariff

like I've always done. You follering me?"

"Tromping on yore heels," said Lafe joyously. "This tinhorn will likewise crave to get his hands on Clyde's roll. He's prob'ly in touch with him. He'll let him know pronto that they's nothing to be feared here. And Clyde'll come smoking back. No doubt of it, ol' son, you got on yore trading harness. But where do you go from there?"

"I dunno," said Pete. "The cards has got to be played as they fall. We'll see. The world's full of problems." He scratched his jaw, squinting at some distant point in the illimitable blue of the sky. "I wonder now, whilst we're ridin' out to Foul Springs, will Phoebe set in the front seat with me?"

CHAPTER II.

FOUL SPRINGS.

IN lazy mid-afternoon, through a species of miracle he did not at first analyze, Pete saw the range country anew—its vastness, as viewed from the high places, outspread in the shimmering remoteness of a shoreless sea; the magnificent distances across which the eye leaped to the far, filmy outline of the iron peaks; the blue sky.

Part of his newly acquired and complacent appreciation of a familiar world was kindled by the voluble chortling of Hiram Perkins and the guarded but equally significant admissions of his gloomy wife. Obviously, to this delighted couple even the harshness and savagery of the frequent desolation they threaded was viewed through roseate glasses. It was as though, in spirit, they had lived long in the mist and gloom of the rain-swept valley and here, outspread before them, was the sunlit freedom of the plains.

But mostly, Pete presently realized, his own new appraisal of the beauty of his environment was occasioned by the simple fact that Phoebe was at his side.

He had encountered no difficulty in his plan of establishing her in the front seat. In fact, surprisingly, she had abetted the maneuver by waving her parents to the rear. The meekness with which they obeyed was proof enough of Lafe's surmise that she was the "king-pin" of the family.

She had merely said, her firm lips somewhat compressed: "I want to talk to Mr. Hanley."

Pete could make nothing of it. Yet he did not examine too closely into her whim. Appraising her in his lazy, expressionless fashion, he thought he had never seen a face more healthy, more wholesome, more good to look upon. Her cheeks were firmly yet piquantly molded. Her hair was dark; her delicate brows arched over hazel eyes that laughed upon the world. It was only when her gaze met his that her eyes ceased to laugh. Then, Pete noted, flushing beneath her scrutiny, they became defiant, aloof, faintly mocking.

She sat at the far end of the seat, being patently careful that she did not brush against him in the lurching and swaying of the surrey's progress. Not by word or gesture, but by her mocking glance and an intangible suggestion of aloofness that cloaked her like truculent armor, she made it plain, ere many miles had passed, that she held him in very low esteem.

Knowing nothing of women, Pete mentally classified this constraint as the normal reaction of a beautiful girl placed by chance in the company of an uncouth citizen of a harsh region. It did not detract from his uplifted mood, nor his inherent right to worship from afar. Though he squirmed throughout his gaunt length when her gaze rested casually upon him, and was sure that tufts were sprouting on his ears and the hand with which he nervously adjusted his bandanna had suddenly become hairy and gorillalike, vague dreams and ambitions stirred slowly within him.

ERE they had passed a landmark in the terrain known locally as the Narrows and so descended upon a great flat extending as far as the eye could see, he knew that until this day and hour his life had been very lonely, that his years had been comprised mostly of profitless toil, of danger that entailed neither prize nor glory, of hardship whose survival brought no reward. And he realized that sitting beside him, demure, self-possessed, infinitely desirable and perhaps attainable, was the embodiment of all those things that life had withheld from him.

And it was on the flat that Phoebe revealed the source of the barrier between them.

"What's that fence?" she inquired, pointing at two strands of wire paralleling their course.

"It's the west line of the Double O," said Pete.

"Why, we've been passing it for miles. Is it all Double O land?"

Pete nodded. "And they's some miles yet. You see that line of brush over yonder? That's the willows along the creek. See them tall poplars just beyond? That's the home ranch."

"It's an immense place, isn't it?" she said, with one of her searching glances. "And it's all yours now."

There was an accusing significance to the last word that Pete could not fathom. He shrugged his shoulders deprecatorily.

"It ain't so big as ranches go in these parts. Twenty-five thousand acres, maybe, under fence. Of course we control more range to the east. Kind of got it bottled up. A hundred square miles, I reckon."

"Immense," the girl repeated. "But what do you mean—we?"

"Well—me," said Pete. "It used to be Hanley Brothers. I generally think of it that way."

"But you crowded him off, didn't you? I mean your brother, Clyde."

It was the first time, except casually, that Clyde's name had been mentioned. A sudden chill, akin to a premonition of danger, coursed rapidly through Pete's gaunt frame. Having schooled himself to mask his emotions, he eyed her placidly as he fumbled in his hickory shirt for the makings.

"Hm-m-m," he said. "Crowded him off?"

"Don't pretend with me, Mr. Pete Hanley," she told him evenly. Though her parents were engrossed in their own discussions behind them, she lowered her voice. "I know all about you. How grasping you are, and unscrupulous. You pretend to be kindly and generous, but you play a waiting game. What you have, you hold. Isn't that your creed? And what you want, you take—even from your brother.."

"Dog-gone!" said Pete. Having lighted his cigarette, he broke the match and studied it for a space before tossing it away. "What else?"

"As I understand it," said the girl, "our place adjoins the home ranch of the Double O. That means that we'll be neighbors in name. But I want you to know that I don't feel neighborly toward you in the least. And I never will."

She eyed him expectantly, her smooth cheeks flushed a little.

"Much obliged," said Pete. He shook the lines. "Unloose a little speed, you slab-sided hay burners! You got a hard-boiled opinion of me, that's plain," he continued, cocking his head at her quizzically. "How does Clyde stack up?"

"I like him very much," she said, the flush deepening. "Yes, he told me about you. Nobody should know you better!"

"In this man's country," said Pete, enigmatically, "talk is a low-priced commodity. It's action that's the real coin of the realm. I wonder now," he ruminated, squinting at the sky, "how

come Clyde went out of his way to give me a send-off like that? Looks like he was throwing a monkey wrench into his own game. Listen"—he turned to her again—"Clyde told you all this in confidence, huh? Never expected you'd tell me, huh?"

THE girl nodded, frowning a little. "I didn't tell mother and father. They don't know anything about you. But I thought it only fair——"

"Correct," said Pete. "It does you credit that you'd let me know where I stood." He grinned. "Another question or two, if you don't mind——"

"Go ahead."

"It was you that done all the trading with Clyde, huh?"

She nodded again. "The folks were a little dubious about it. They had always dreamed about coming up to the high country. For years and years. But they thought they were too old to make a move. Dad wanted to take a trip up here to look over the ranch first. But Clyde wouldn't listen to it. He said it wasn't necessary at all. If they didn't like it, after we got here, he'd trade back again and pay our traveling expenses. But they'll like it, of course; it's the kind of place they've talked about as long as I can remember. So I persuaded them to do it."

"Dog-gone," said Pete, in awe. "If everybody in the world had faith like that, they wouldn't be no need for sheriffs and courts! What ails paw?" He jerked his head guardedly toward the rear seat. "How come he puffs like that?"

"Asthma," said the girl. "That's one reason I insisted. It was getting worse all the time. I'm sure it'll do him good. Up here in this wonderful air. And it has. He says he feels better already."

"And maw?"

"She likes it. It's the first time in months I've heard her laugh."

"Hm-m-m," said Pete. "One last question. Clyde claimed to have took quite a shine to you, huh?"

"I don't object to indulging your curiosity when it comes to our general affairs," said the girl severely. "It's customary here, I suppose. But that question is mere impertinence."

"Excuse it, please," said Pete.

The team had slowed to a walk. He tightened the reins now and brought them to a halt.

"Why are you stopping?" questioned the girl.

They were opposite a sagging section of wire whose ends were attached to a stake set into two barbed loops. Beyond this gate was a bleak terrain of sand dunes and outcropping rock. The bunch grass was sparse here, the sage stunted and grotesque. Crickets buzzed incessantly on the far sweltering expanse. No human habitation, nor feed rack nor grazing animal marred the lifeless desert. Its desolation was the more savage by contrast to the verdant freshness of alfalfa in the meadow across a distant fence.

"Just to give you an idea," said Pete, "what ground looks like that's plumb worthless."

The girl shivered. "It's terrible. Fantastic, sort of. It makes you wonder what purpose it serves in creation."

"It's sure got a purpose," said Pete.

"What's that?" puffed Hiram Perkins, pointing to a pillar of miasmic mist that arose from a dark stain on a bleak hillside. "Look's like steam rising up."

"It is," said Pete. "They's hot sulphur and other stuff in that mud. That's where the section gets its name. It's called Foul Springs."

"Let's go, young man," said Mrs. Perkins fretfully. "This country's all right, I guess. But there's some parts of it that gives me the creeps. That's our place over yonder, isn't it, where the fields are so green?"

THERE was something in this simple question, uttered with implicit faith, that stilled the words Pete was about to utter. Throughout their journey from Lodgepole he had been preparing himself in spirit for this moment. He had halted his team for a purpose. He had given them a view of the desolate terrain, so that they could fully grasp the terrific truth—that here, before their eyes, in this segment of nightmare wilderness marring the face of the fertile flat, was represented the dream ranch for which had been exchanged the meager savings of a lifetime.

He had been about to say: "Well, folks, here she is. Look it over. This is what you traded for."

Thus he had planned it. But as he turned in his seat to look back at Hiram Perkins and his wife—even as his lips framed the regretful words that would be similar, in effect, to blasting the solid ground from beneath their feet—he knew that he could not do it. In the twinkling of an eye, their status had changed.

They were no longer mere pawns to be used for the downfall of Clyde, for the salving of his own selfish pride, to be sacrificed so that he could reëstablish himself in the eyes of the girl. They were no more pilgrims. They were people of flesh and blood, "real folks," Phoebe's kin. They were individuals with a right to happiness, to dreams long appraised, to a foothold in the Promised Land. These things, so they believed, were within their view. They were, also, with his wealth in land and resources, within his power to bestow. What, after all, was even the choice Willow Creek section compared to the vastness of the Double O? What was the humbling of Clyde compared to having Phoebe near by?

"Dog-gone," he muttered beneath his breath. "I got to figger another play."

Aloud he said, turning back and shaking the lines: "Giddap, broncs! Yeah, that's it, Mrs. Perkins"—he grinned slowly as he repeated her words—words which expressed in simple terms the wistfulness of life itself—"over yonder, where the fields is green."

CHAPTER III.

THE PROMISED LAND.

BETWEEN the point where they had halted to view Foul Springs and the entrance to the fertile Willow Creek section, a dusty mile of road intervened. Along this stretch the team proceeded at a brisk trot. Hiram Perkins and his good wife, during these impatient minutes, sat on the edge of their seat, their eyes fixed upon the approaching kingdom of their dreams.

As the indescribably wholesome and sweet odor of blossoming alfalfa permeated the air about them and the green of lush fields crept up to parallel the way, they cackled their exultance aloud. Hiram wheezed and guffawed his delight by turns. His good wife was more guarded in her revelation of emotion, but her gloomy eyes were alight. The girl, too, was flushed and breathless. Details of Willow Creek, it was plain, fitted exactly into the picture created by oft-discussed dreams.

"There's the windmill," puffed Hiram, "and the orchard. Lookit the sunshine on the water amongst the tules! Who said this was a dry country?"

"Looks like there's a good roof on the house," said Mrs. Perkins, shading her eyes. "I hope it doesn't leak. Oh, my, there's a stone chimney! With creepers on it!"

"Why," said the girl, with a catch in her voice, as they turned into a lane bordered by lush grass, "it's a beautiful place! We aren't pioneers at all. We'll be living in comfort. I do believe that's honeysuckle climbing on the porch! Is it, Mr. Hanley?"

"Roses," muttered Pete. "You got to lay 'em down and cover 'em to protect against frost in the winter. It's lots of trouble. But in the spring they bloom like blazes. They's plenty more over to the home ranch."

He spoke absently, almost unaware that he had made reply. He sat slumped on the seat, his sombrero pulled low, his cigarette hanging motionless from his lazy lips. Throughout the ride from Foul Springs he had been engrossed in what he was wont to term "heavy thinking," his speculations ranging far afield like wolves seeking a scent.

He was somewhat appalled at what he had done. It had been a generous gesture contrary to his accepted reputation as an honest but shrewd trader. Never before had he followed sudden impulse blindly. Yet he did not regret it. In some inexplicable way, in fact, it warmed his heart, gave him a new and proprietary interest in Hiram Perkins and his melancholy spouse—and the girl. Most of all, though she did not know it nor give him credit therefor, was the fact that in this manner he was able to contribute to Phoebe's happiness.

The additional fact that by his gesture he had played directly into Clyde's hands—had again footed the bill for his ruthless brother in a soft-hearted manner that would certainly cause the belligerent Lafe to gnash his teeth in rage—he did not at the moment consider. How to exact some toll from Clyde was a problem for future consideration. Other and more imperative complications were immediately before him.

The plain truth of it was that the Perkins trio believed they had title to this fertile homestead, into which they were now penetrating with the awed delight of children, circus-bound, who at last have passed all barriers and stand within the vaulted dome of the big tent. But the deed, reposing in the purse clutched tightly in Phoebe's gloved hand was not for Willow Creek, but for the adjoining desolation of Foul Springs. The deception had been easy, since they had no remotest suspicion of having been swindled by the unscrupulous Clyde. But how maintain that deception?

FOR a few days, no doubt, while they were establishing themselves in their new home, there would be nothing to fear. But as soon as they talked to neighbors, became acquainted in the high desert, took their places as accepted members of the community, they would discover, as a matter of common knowledge, that Clyde had never owned Willow Creek.

Examination of their title would mean nothing to them, of course, since they were unfamiliar with township and section lines. But an even swifter way to immediate and terrific disillusionment would be if they should record their title at Lodgepole. The recorder, who knew the descriptions of the richest sections of the county by heart, would immediately set them right.

How to get around this problem, Pete at first could not imagine. He cast about desperately in his mind for some solution, while escorting the trio on a tour of inspection over their supposed new home. Their delight in each new discovery warmed him anew and at the same time increased his worry. The more thoroughly they were sold on the delightful aspects of Willow Creek, into whose possession they believed they had come, the more devastating would be the blow if they should ever discover that these treasures were beyond their grasp.

Hiram Perkins, like an exultant explorer with new worlds before him, departed at a wheezing lope to look into the substantial barns, corrals and feed lots. But the women bore down immediately upon the house, and Pete followed at their heels.

"Why," said Phoebe, turning to him

breathlessly, they stood in the beamed living room at whose end a great stone fireplace yawned hospitably, "it's all furnished! Clyde told us there were some things here, but I had no idea it was as completely equipped as this. What wonderful furniture! So—so homelike. All hand-made, isn't it?"

"We had a foreman once," Pete explained. "A family man who was shorely a wizard with tools. He'd rather be wrastling with a hand saw and a hammer and a fancy plane than eat. Wintertimes, whilst things was slack, he tricked out the whole place. When he was done, he started in on the home ranch. They's real furniture there, also. We was sure sorry to see him go. But he was a good man, and we staked him to some foundation stock so he got a start for himself. Doing well, too."

"What do you mean—*we* staked him to stock?" asked Phoebe, smilingly.

"Give Clyde the credit if you want," said Pete, shrugging his shoulders. "I was just explaining how come."

"Those bear-skin rugs are nice," said Mrs. Perkins, "but they catch the dust. Phoebe, child, let's look over the other rooms. They're probably a sight, with the cobwebs and all. I'm afraid to go into the kitchen."

Despite these gloomy predictions, the good lady hurried away, almost trotting in her excitement. Phoebe followed her, and Pete lowered himself into a chair, reaching for the makings.

TEARS were in the eyes of both mother and daughter when they returned. Their faces were radiant. Pete eyed them, grinning.

"It's all so wonderful—wonderful!" breathed the girl. "There's even a sink and running water. And hot-water coils in the kitchen range. And fireplaces in both bedrooms upstairs. Oh, it's too good to be true!"

"It's all got to be gone over," said her mother, dabbing at her eyes with a handkerchief. "The dust and all. But I guess we'll get along. I expected m-much worse." She turned to her daughter and clung to her, her voice shaken. "M-maybe it'll make a good home for you, child."

"There, there," Phoebe soothed. Over the older woman's shoulder she laughed at Pete, starry-eyed. "When you knock at the pearly gates, mother, and they let you in, I do believe you'll look around you and shake your head critically, and say: 'Nice place. But I'll bet it's drafty. And those robes ought to have embroidered hems.' "

"Hush, child," said her mother. "You shouldn't talk like that. And I'm not complaining."

"You thought it was terrible to trade for a place you never saw," accused the girl. "Now, wasn't I right all the while? Clyde hadn't exaggerated a bit. In fact, he didn't tell it all. Just think of it, mother! It's practically ready to move into. We'll only have to buy a few things. Father will have some money left to buy some cows. And work horses."

"And p-pigs," said her mother.

"If we only had our trunks here, with our bedding, we wouldn't have to go back to town to-night."

"You don't have to," said Pete. "You can stop over to the home ranch with me. They's plenty of room. Or better still," he continued, "since I got a hunch you folks would rather move right into yore own billiwack, I'll send one of the boys over with bedding. Don't you worry about it, neither, Mrs. Perkins. It's fresh-laundered and clean as dew. By ol' Hi Low up to Lodgepole." He grinned. "They's no dust in it. Nor wood ticks."

"Ridiculous," scoffed Mrs. Perkins. "If you can spare it, we'll just stay here to-night. And thank you kindly."

"I'll send over some grub, also. You got to eat."

"We'll repay you to-morrow when we

get supplies," said the girl. "Just because we're neighbors, we don't want to be in your debt—in any way whatsoever."

Hiram Perkins now charged in, puffing and all but apoplectic.

"Maw," he wheezed, "come a-running. Lookit one ace-high layout. The barn's a real barn. Stalls for horses and milk cows and the biggest haymow I ever saw. Hog pens. Feed racks. Corrals. We got the world by the tail. And wait till you see where your garden's going to be! Farm machinery? There's sulky plows and harrows and hay-tedders galore. And harness hanging on the walls——"

"Which reminds me," said Pete. "Step over to the ranch to-morrow and pick out a team of work hosses. No"—he silenced the girl, who was about to demur—"I ain't going to do any trading with him. He can name his own price, and pay when he feels like it. I'll be glad to get rid of some of them hay-burners."

"Fine," puffed Hiram Perkins. "Pete, my boy, I see we're going to be real neighbors. And I hope we'll be good neighbors, too. Much obliged. Come on, maw——"

He all but dragged his spouse away. It was plain that years had fallen from the shoulders of both. Their voices died away in the direction of the garden at the rear.

THE girl moved to the door and looked forth for a space, leaning on the threshold. The house faced west. In late afternoon, the sun was low over the encircling mesa. Already, a shadow was advancing across the valley floor. The texture of the arching sky was changing. It was less metallic, more soft and blue. The quiet and beautiful hours that precede sundown in the high country were close at hand.

Standing thus, in the slanting sunlight, the girl's face and figure were framed in gold. Pete contemplated her, motionless and scarce daring to breathe, as in the presence of a beautiful picture. She smiled at him suddenly, over her shoulder. He drew nearer then, hat in hand, and leaned against the threshold at her side.

When he looked down at her, bashfully, meeting her gaze, he saw that her hazel eyes were mocking and aloof as ever. Yet there was a question in them, as though she were confronted by facts that were faintly puzzling.

"It was nice of you to drive us out here to-day," she said. "It was generous to loan us bedding, and food. Your offer of horses at father's own price was surprising. I hope there's no catch in it. I'll give you the benefit of the doubt and tell you that I appreciate all you've done for us. Yes, I appreciate it a great deal."

"Giving the devil his due, huh?" responded Pete. "'S all right, Phoebe. Excuse it—can I call you Phoebe?"

"Hm-m-m," she said. "Since we're neighbors like this, and probably will continue to be, I suppose it would be ridiculous for you to call me Miss Perkins forever. People would notice it, wouldn't they? In this country, where everybody is so friendly. Yes, you may call me Phoebe. It's just a concession to local custom, you understand, Mr. Hanley——"

"Pete," he corrected, in the same mocking vein.

"Pete." She nodded, smiling a little. She looked up at him in frank appraisal. "You know, you could easily pass as a very nice person. You look so honest and—rugged, sort of. Your face inspires confidence. And your eyes are kindly."

"Dog-gone," murmured Pete. "You are embarrassing me scandalous. I ain't used to having my markings read this a way. Tell me I look like Clyde, now, and I'll fall apart in hunks and go

crowling off with a laig under each arm."

"No, she said, "you are different from Clyde. I believe I could almost like you if I didn't know so much about you. Tell me, why have you dealt so generously with us? Was it"—she put the question deliberately—"so you could climb on the band wagon with Clyde? In our esteem?"

"No," said Pete. "I run my own band wagon. Clyde's acquired an ace-high standing with you folks—particularly with you—on account of this trade, huh?"

"Why not?" she countered. "It's perfectly plain to me that this ranch is worth more than our grocery store and house down in the valley. We valued our holdings there at about six thousand. So he didn't cheat us at all. In fact, we got much the better of the bargain. So my confidence in him was certainly not misplaced."

YEAH," Pete agreed. "Willow Creek's worth more than that. They ain't any too much bottom land, with plenty water this a way, in the high desert. Whoever's got it is setting pretty."

"What are you laughing at?" she demanded, for quizzical wrinkles had gathered anew beneath his eyes.

"Nothing," he averred hastily. "Just thinking of things as between me and Clyde. Everything I do seems to hoist him in yore regard. Even when I treat you in a neighborly way, according to my lights, you bristle up and get suspicious that a way."

"I shouldn't feel like that, of course," she said. "I do appreciate your kindness to us. But since we're talking so frankly, I'll confess that I'm wondering about your real motive. It doesn't spring merely from a desire to be neighborly and friendly. We mean nothing to you. You never saw us before today. Your resources are fifty, a hundred times greater than ours. You are sole owner of an empire. You probably don't even want small farmers like us near by. You hate Clyde. When you hate a man, you hate his friends. We're friends of his, so you should hate us. Therefore, there's something mysterious back of your sudden interest in us. That's all I meant."

"Now there," stated Pete, grinning frankly now, "is logic, and I don't mean maybe."

"Don't laugh at me, if you please. I want things perfectly understood between us at the outset."

"O. K.," said Pete. "Get a holt of yoreself, lady, and hang on. I'm going to tell you a thing or two, speaking blunt and earnest like them primitive citizens of the wilderness are supposed to talk. They's nothing mysterious about it. Fact is, I'm surprised you ain't figured it out all by yourself.

"For instance"—he squinted at her with critical gravity—"ain't anybody ever told you that you was a dang good-looking gal—healthy and wholesome and sound at heart—the kind of a gal for whose smile a lonely gent would scale mountains and cross burning deserts, and for whose good opinion he'd risk all he had, including his neck and his hopes of the hereafter? Think hard, now. I'll gamble even Clyde dropped a hint or two along that line about the first time you made talk together. At any rate, you've done suspected that there was something or another about you that caught the eye of every onattached citizen between the ages of sixteen and sixty, huh?"

"Of course." Her smooth cheeks flushed a little. But her eyes met his steadily. "What of it?"

"Just this," said Pete. "The plain truth of it is that I've done took a shine to you and yore ace-high parents. They're the kind of folks that talks my own lauguage and whose ways I savvy. I'm glad to have 'em as neighbors.

Your paw is going to be happy here. And yore maw. But most of all, Phoebe, I've done took a shine to you."

"Well!" said Phoebe, with arched brows. "Really?"

"You asked me, an' I'm tellin' you," stated Pete, flushing in his turn. "I know you don't think I amount to nothing. I know you're prejudiced against me. It's plain Clyde's done his dangedest to steal my anty before I ever had a chance to set in the game. But I hope to prove he's wrong. I aim to prove he's wrong. That's all.

"I never seen you before to-day. Soon's I seen you, I knew it was final. If I can help smooth the way, or better yore hand, I'm for it and no questions asked. They's nothing deep or mysterious about it. No skullduggery. No strings attached." Having rolled a cigarette, he now lighted it and tossed the match away. "You craved the brutal truth," he concluded, puffing slowly. "You got it, humorous as it is."

IT was the first time she had seen him shaken from his lethargic manner, his slumbering forces revealed. Lips parted, she had looked up at him, watching the play of emotions that swept his face. It had been like the temporary lifting of a mask, the lowering of a guard. It had been a revelation, a thrilling glimpse of the inner man. But the mask had now returned. He peered down at her lazily, grinning.

"I wasn't laughing, really," she protested, laying an impulsive hand on his arm. "The admiration, respect, of any man, if it is sincere——"

"No matter how low down he is," he agreed, nodding. "'S all right. Let it pass. It can wait, whilst we turn our attention to heftier matters. An idea comes to me, Phoebe, concerning a subject I've been pondering off an' on. The deed that Clyde give you—it was made out to you?"

"Yes," she said, with a return to her guarded manner. "The folks said I could call it my place. Why?"

"Just thinking," he said, squinting at the sun. "I got to go to town to-morrow again. Picking up some supplies and run a few errands here and there. I can also pick up yore trunks and things. And I'd best take that deed along and record it for you, huh? That is," he amended, as she studied him in silence, "if you can trust me with it."

A simple solution of the problem of keeping the girl from realizing that they were living on ground to which they had no claim had come to him. If she would turn over the Foul Springs deed to him for recording, he could retain possession of it and substitute a new deed to Willow Creek.

This was a risky proceeding, at best; for if she examined the instrument upon its return from the recorder's office, she would discover that it was his name, and not Clyde's that guaranteed title in a certain section to her heirs and assigns forever. Should she question this fact, he could tell her that Clyde had made an entirely natural mistake in the description of the section, an error in boundaries that necessitated the writing of a new deed.

Such an explanation, he knew, would not stand up under critical analysis. Investigation would uncover Clyde's trail. But there was a chance that she would not notice the new signature on the deed. In any event, it was the best that could be done, under the circumstances. Some time would certainly elapse before the show-down, and in the meantime, a scheme involving retribution for Clyde might be hit upon.

But the girl checkmated his plan at the outset.

"I'll record the deed myself," she said. "I could trust you, of course, not to lose it. But I've got to go to town myself to-morrow. There's all kinds of things we have to buy. We'll make a list to-night."

"Hm-m-m," he said, scratching his jaw. "Then you'd best go with me. I'm taking the spring wagon, you savvy. You won't travel in style. It'll prob'ly shake you loose from your eye teeth."

This challenge, as he had hoped, brought her instant acceptance.

"Shucks," she said. "I'm no Dresden-china doll. Certainly I'll ride with you in the spring wagon. And thank you again. In a few days we'll be organized so that we won't have to make such calls upon you. This time"—she laughed up at him with more frankness—"I won't repay your kindness by accusing you of sinister motives."

In this, however, she was wrong. For Pete, as he left Willow Creek and proceeded to the home ranch of the Double O, was pondering the specific business of how, by hook or crook, he could detach her from the Foul Springs deed before their arrival at the recorder's office on the morrow.

CHAPTER IV.

SKULLDUGGERY.

"DOG-GONE," said County Recorder Smalley, grinning at Pete. "It sounds shock-proof, all right. If the gal's as innocent and trusting as that, we can prob'ly put it acrost. But you're asking me to take part in crooked work that would cost my official neck, not to mention my private reputation and plenty grief in the courts, if it's found out on me. I'd say off hand that you got considerable of a crust to come sloping to me with such a proposition. I'm plumb surprised at you."

The grizzled old ex-cattleman, wrinkled of feature and keen of eye, was not as truculent and disapproving as his words suggested. He knew Pete of old, and had know his father before him. The dignity of his office weighed lightly upon him. His integrity was unassailable. But he also belonged to a generation that had justly hewed to the line before the era of courts, legal entanglements as well as official red tape.

Pete had already explained the status of affairs with respect to himself, Clyde and the Perkins family. He was sure that the old-timer, convinced that he, Pete, was merely taking a short cut to an objective that was above question, would fall in with his plan.

"I wouldn't ask you to, Mr. Smalley, except it's the only way to get at the heart of it without spilling the beans. It's what you'd call a worthy enterprise. I'm gunning for Clyde's scalp, to teach him a lesson and make a man of himself. I've done warned him, and pleaded with him and threatened. Now I got to treat him rough. And, also, I've——"

"Don't kid me, young feller," said the other, wagging his head. "I can see through a barb-wire fence. I can tell the difference between a hoss and a cow, the last named having horns. You crave to throw the hooks into Clyde, all right Which same is one noble enterprise that you've done postponed too long. But the main thing back of yore grim and unrelenting interest in world affairs is that you yearn to kick all the rocks out of the gal's trail and make a blasted boolevard out of it, lined with potted palms. Yeah, thus adding a star or two to yore haywire crown."

"No," said Pete earnestly. "If things work out the way I figger, she'll never be none the wiser. That's the whole purpose of the frame-up. She thinks she owns Willow Creek. It would bust her heart and prob'ly put her ace-high folks down and out if they suspected different. So I've given her title to Willow Creek. I've just placed it on record. It's hers. Nobody can move her from it. But for purposes of holding a club over Clyde's head, I crave title to Foul Springs."

"'S all right," said the recorder.

"Fetch her up. It ain't according to Hoyle, but I'll do it. Where's she at?"

"Around town buyin' supplies. I'll have her here pronto. Now play 'em careful, ol' son. She's got a trusting disposition and all that. But if she gets suspicious, we're sunk."

"And listen," admonished the recorder. "If they's any slip-up of any kind whatsoever as a result of this said skullduggery, you're takin' the entire blame and will undertake to clear the record to the satisfaction of all concerned, huh?"

"To the limit," said Pete.

HE departed immediately, and in a few minutes returned with Phoebe. The frame-up, as arranged and rehearsed between himself and Smalley, worked with smoothness and precision.

Pete led her to the wicket at the grilled counter behind which the recorder stood, puffing lazily at his pipe. That worthy beamed upon the girl when Pete introduced her, spoke of the weather and politely hoped that she and her parents would find happiness in the high desert. Scarcely glancing at the deed, he drew forth his receipt and prepared to make it out.

The seeming carelessness and appearance of official routine that cloaked the entire incident made for its success. As he wrote the receipt, Smalley talked on in the neighborly vein common to the range country. His pencil, scratching industriously, slowed to a halt. He adjusted his steel-rimmed glasses anew and peered at the boundary descriptions contained in the instrument.

"Hm-m-m," he said, without surprise. "Clyde's done made a mistake in the section number." He took up the deed, approached a huge township map on the wall, compared the data and returned. "Yeah," he said. "It should be Section Sixteen. That likewise throws off the whole boundary description. Folks is too dog-gone careless in things like that. Lucky I was on my toes and caught it. You got to be pernickety when it comes to instruments o' law."

"Well," said the girl, "what's to be done?"

"Change 'em," suggested Pete. "Make 'em right. Them boundary lines have got to be correct."

"They's got to be a paragraph wrote to explain the said corrections," explained Smalley, "which you got to sign, Miss Perkins. We'll have my gals witness it. It won't take but a minnit or two."

He repaired to the rear of the office and dictated in low tones to a stenographer. He returned presently, knocking the ashes from his pipe.

"She'll have it out in a jiffy." He leaned on the counter, fumbled in his hip picket and drew forth a tobacco can. "And how do you like the high desert, Miss Perkins? What you've seen of it thus far? Some different from the valley, I'll gamble."

They talked carelessly while the distant typewriter rattled. Pete yawned and rolled a cigarette. The typist was through, presently, and brought the deed forward. Smalley dipped a pen in ink, presented it to the girl and indicated the place for her to sign. In doing so, his gnarled hand rested on the newly added paragraph, hiding its contents from view.

The girl signed it. Smalley blotted the signature carefully. Two stenographers paused from their labors to append their names as witnesses, and the document was tossed into a near-by drawer.

"As yore contribution to the dignity, upkeep and maintainance of this office," said the recorder, "one dollar sixty."

Smilingly the girl paid the fee and tucked the receipt into her purse.

"Willow Creek is mine now, isn't it?"

she told Pete proudly, her eyes alight. "Nobody can take it from me."

"Correct," agreed Pete, with a sigh of relief. "Shock-proof and guaranteed. To yore heirs and assigns forever."

Briefly, the gaze of the two men met. The girl did not know all that had transpired in this casual meeting. Willow Creek was hers, though she had never seen the deed that Pete had recorded before her coming. The paragraph that had apparently been written so carelessly, and which she had signed without reading, was an assignment of Foul Springs to Pete.

"Let's go," said Pete. "We still got plenty errands to run before we pull out for home. Smalley, much obliged."

BRILLIANT sunlight flooded the streets of Lodgepole. In uplifted moods arising from differing sources, they descended from the courthouse and moved down the lazy street. Pete whistled a nameless melody between his teeth, his battered sombrero tilted at an unconsciously rakish angle. The girl swung lithely beside him, her stride full and free.

Acquaintances bellowed at Pete from near and far. Proprietors in store fronts grinned upon him. Mounted men flung up arms in genial greeting, teeth flashing. The girl looked up at him, laughingly, but faintly puzzled.

"I seem to be traveling with a person of importance," she said. "Are people really as friendly to you as they seem? Or do they envy you, and perhaps admire your business methods? Is it you or the Double O that they're saluting?"

"These folks know me," replied Pete, somewhat shortly, a shadow falling across his sunny mood. "This here's my country. If I was afoot and in rags, I'd still claim friends. Yeah, of the kind that money couldn't buy. Nor big talk." But the shadow passed. He beamed down at her with quizzical tolerance. "You're a suspicious gal, ain't you? In lots of ways. And trusting as a lamb in others. Depends on who you're called on to trust, huh?"

"You're asking me to trust you implicitly, I take it."

"I'm askin' nothing," said Pete. "Look, here's the spring wagon. Now, then, you got some more shopping to do, huh? Give me them baggage checks meanwhile, and I'll take the team over to the depot and get yore trunks. I'll pick you up here after a spell. It'll take me some time over to the depot. I got a flock of telegrams to send off."

"You do quite a lot of business by wire?"

"Plenty," said Pete carelessly. "They's always something coming up. Beef shipments. The latest prices at the stock yards. And so forth."

"I'm beginning to see," said the girl, nodding, "that running a huge ranch like the Double O is quite a business undertaking. It's too bad our affairs have taken so much of your time."

"Sho," said Pete. "I ain't even going to make reply to that haywire remark. Don't buy out the town. See you later."

As he drove toward the depot, Lafe pounced forth from the livery stable and brought his equipment to a halt.

"Hold everything," announced that worthy. He placed a foot on the front wheel and eyed Pete accusingly. "Give an account of yoreself, you gangling Romeo. How come you're promenading around town with that rosy-cheeked heart-breaker, thick as thieves this a way? How come them pilgrims ain't on the warpath? Let's have it all in a bunch."

"Lafe," said Pete, lowering his voice, "you told that tinhorn over to the Ten Strike about the layout like we agreed, huh?"

"I did," said Lafe. "I let slip, in an alleged moment of weakness, that you was footing the bill for Clyde. You

was avoiding a scandal that a way, as usual. Bellered plenty about how you was just that soft-hearted. He was some pleased. He informed me this morning, gloating, that Clyde would be back here in a day or two. To strut his stuff and make you sweat. So the wheels is moving. Meanwhile, have you got them pilgrims ribbed up to get Clyde's scalp when he shows up?"

"THE time ain't ripe yet," said Pete, his gloomy eyes twinkling. "Listen. One more piece of missionary work and your contribution to world events is done. You're talking to me now, you savvy. They can see you from the Ten Strike. Just you ease over there after a spell, hostile as a bear with a boil, and do some more confiding to that tinhorn.

"Tell him that I done weakened with them pilgrims to the extent that I actually give 'em a deed to Willow Creek and took back Foul Springs in exchange. Won't that give Clyde a laugh when he shows up? He's right where he started from, you savvy, and six thousand to the good. Fact is, it's just the same as if Clyde had sold *me* Foul Springs for six thousand. And after you've let all that register, make him swear he won't tell a soul. Not even Clyde. Result is, he won't tell nobody else. But he *will* tell Clyde. You follering me?"

"I am," said Lafe, bristling. "But don't tell me you've pulled such a soft-hearted play as that." He searched Pete's face and swore beneath his breath. "You have, by gravy! You've gotten soft on that gal and aim to see her fixed regardless. You're actually going to let Clyde get by with his confidence game, chuckling up his sleeve! Son of a gun, leave me go get my shooting iron and put you out of yore misery!"

"Sh-h!" warned Pete. "Don't get rushed off. Smooth down them hackles. Yeah, Lafe, ol' son, I'm admitting that I've developed a large-sized yen for Phoebe. As between good friends, do you blame me? I'm likewise admitting that I'm plumb determined to smooth the path for them pilgrims. But as far as Clyde is concerned"—he spoke significantly—"I'm figgering."

"Now that's different," said Lafe, instantly mollified. "Figgering, huh? Excuse it, please. Yeah"—he removed his foot from the wheel and waved Pete away—"proceed, mister. I ain't conceited enough to inquire too close into yore mysterious designs. But if you claim to be a friend of mine, leave me be amongst those present when you nail Clyde's scalp on the fence."

"I ain't promising nothing," warned Pete. "More than one hoss trade has fell down when the time come to put up the boot money. But maybe the cards'll fall according to Hoyle."

"Nuff said." Lafe grinned. "Heaven help the widows and orphans when Pete Hanley starts hoping for the best! Yeah, more strength to yore arm, caballero."

Pete completed his business at the depot. The wires he sent were long and did not refer to beef shipments, market quotations or any of the routine affairs he had mentioned to Phoebe. He brought back the Perkins baggage, went the rounds of various mercantile establishments to pick up her purchases and his own prodigious supplies for the Double O. With the spring wagon filled to capacity, they started forth from town.

For Pete it was a pleasant ride home in the lethargy of mid-afternoon. The familiar miles had never seemed shorter. The girl was less constrained toward him, less on gaurd. They talked much and laughed together as old friends. Back of her ease of manner, he knew, lurking deep beneath her outward acceptance of him as neighbor and friend, was the old aloofness, the old mocking defiance, the original and stubborn sus-

picion. It was more hidden now, but there.

Yet this knowledge did not rouse his former active resentment. The status of things had changed subtly. A few days more, he was sure, and all these matters would be adjusted. To the satisfaction, he hoped humbly, of all concerned.

CHAPTER V.
A FORCED PLAY.

IT was a week later that Pete discovered how the "best-laid schemes of mice and men" may so easily go wrong; how the shrewdest of traders—though they may be masters of psychology and skilled students of human motives—can so readily overlook the essential ingredient that molds human behavior.

It chanced that he and his wranglers were laboring in the great corrals that bordered the buildings of the home ranch to the south. Here, some fourscore rotund and bewildered calves, having been separated from their bawling parents, were in the process of having the Double O brand inscribed forever upon their outraged flanks. The time was late afternoon. The heat was intense. Grimy, perspiring and in the short-tempered mood that is part and parcel with branding time, Pete wrought where the dust was thickest, iron in hand.

He had just sent a sturdy young maverick bellowing forth to freedom, and had returned the iron to the coals. Straightening up, he beheld his ancient and disreputable cook—who had been gravely christened "Hokum" by the thoughtful crew—beckoning from beyond the inclosure. He strode forward impatiently, wiping the blinding perspiration from his eyes.

"Well?" he demanded. "What ails you, Hokum?"

"Some folks to see you," announced the other, jerking a thumb toward the poplar-shrouded house.

"They didn't send you out with a calling card, did they?" questioned Pete sarcastically. "Are they crippled? Tell 'em I'm busier than a bob-tailed bull in fly time. If they crave to make talk with me, let 'em come out and roost on the corral. Who are they, anyway?" He peered at the grinning old reprobate more narrowly. "It ain't them city dudes that have been prowling around Foul Springs the last few days?"

"No," said Hokum, with the air of one who bears heavy tidings. "Boss, you'd be surprised. It's yore noble, cake-eating brother, Clyde."

"Clyde!" repeated Pete.

"I don't blame you none for looking pop-eyed," stated the other, with the frankness of one who had seen many seasons pass on the Double O. "I had half a pumpkin laying on the table beside me at the cook shack. I dang near socked him with it just for percentage. I would have," he averred, shifting his quid of tobacco to the other check, "except my aim ain't as good as it used to be. I was afraid of beaning the gal."

"The gal! What gal?"

"Phoebe. Thick as thieves and all togged out like Shasta daisies, the pair of 'em. Clyde's riding one of them livery-stable hosses. Easy and languid that a way, like a gilded polecat setting on a golden throne. The gal's riding that gentle paint you give her last week. If Clyde had asked me to go sleuthing for you, I'd have bit 'im. But it was Phoebe that give me the eye. 'We want to talk to Pete,' she says. 'Go get him, won't you, Hokum?' And she onloosed a smile on me that made me dang near tromp on my whiskers picking up speed."

The ancient one eyed his employer with trepidation, suddenly abashed. He had known Pete since childhood. By the signs it was plain now that the ap-

parently lethargic youth was in the grip of inner rage that was grim and terrific. These signs, save to the initiated, were few. His face, glistening and grimy, was a forbidding mask. His eyes were hard and metallic, with a glint as of steel. Outwardly, he was self-contained and composed as always.

He turned, gave a few brief orders to his men. He scaled the corral fence with an effortless ease of motion which, to Hokum, was vaguely sinister.

"Fade," Pete directed that worthy tersely. "Make yoreself scarce. Yeah, I'll talk to 'em."

Hokum faded. Pete strode forward, his chin sunk on his chest.

IT was not Clyde's presence on the ranch that was as gall and wormwood to his soul. The coming of his ruthless brother was not, in fact, wholly unexpected. It was an event included among the probabilities of his plan. But the simple fact that had caused his carefully builded structure to collapse like a house of cards was that Phoebe had accompanied Clyde. In friendliness. Reëstablished on intimate terms. "Thick as thieves," Hokum had said. And why?

Pete's nimble thoughts had already leaped far ahead. Clyde had undoubtedly admitted to Phoebe that he had deliberately swindled her. It seemed impossible — inconceivable — that even Clyde's glib excuses could have prevailed upon her to accept him anew on a plane of friendship. Yet the facts spoke for themselves. They were together. Smilingly. At ease. It was a situation that struck direct at all he had deemed impregnable. It involved a doubt of his own resources, of Phoebe, of his stubborn conviction that in the end justice must prevail.

"Dog-gone," he told himself bitterly. "I ain't complaining. But is it possible that after all Clyde's done to me, he can still gouge me on the last play? And the biggest stakes? We'll see. Get a holt of yoreself, cowboy, and hang on."

The pair were waiting on the driveway immediately in front of the broad steps leading up to the stone-arched patio flanking the entrance to the massive ranch house of the Double O. They were still in the saddle, their horses together. They were engaged in guarded, smiling conversation. And as Pete took note of certain details of pose and equipment, an air of ease and elegance that surrounded the pair—as though they had stepped forth immaculate, debonair and self-assured from the pages of an aristocratic social register—he knew that the situation could not have been more cunningly designed for his humiliation.

The girl was mounted on the sleek paint pony he had given her some days previously, attired in a trim, modish riding habit that made her appear more boyish, yet more poised. She had brought this tailored ensemble with her from the valley, no doubt, in preparation for much use in a region where horseflesh was king. He, Pete, had never before seen her wear it. That she was thus bedecked, accompanied by Clyde—obviously, it seemed, for the purpose of playing up to Clyde's spectacular and even more brilliant plumage—was the last straw, as it were, adding to Pete's inner chagrin.

Clyde, as always, was attired like a range king. His new-found prosperity, the "easy money" derived from the sale of the Perkins late holdings in the valley, had led his taste to such sartorial elegances as tailored riding breeches, polished cavalry boots, a beaded jacket of white buckskin and a pearl-gray sombrero of aristocratic vintage.

Mounted on a rangy, glossy-coated mount that represented the cream of the Lodgepole livery stable, he was an eye-filling picture. On his smooth, handsome face—unmarred as yet by years of self-indulgence and easy living

—was the habitual, supercilious, arrogant smile that was a part of his glittering personality.

By contrast to this modish pair, Pete felt himself to be a shambling figure—uncouth, unlettered, unshaven. The dust of the branding pens was heavy on his jeans. His hickory shirt was torn and grimed. His hands were not well-manicured and soft, life Clyde's, but were muscular and gnarled, the hands of a toiler.

He was a part of his environment, the contrast made it appear—a plodding fellow, close to the soil, separated from a world of beauty and intellect and elegance as by the space between stars, and from that higher plane these two were now looking down upon him, tolerantly, superciliously, with thinly veiled amusement.

SO Pete felt as he strode toward them, mopping his face with a dusty bandanna. It did not give him a sense of inferiority, his own self-respect being builded on less trivial and superficial things. His was the creed that conceded equality to all and superiority to none. But it added to his inner hurt, his resentment and smoldering rage that Phoebe, even outwardly, should thus take her stand with Clyde and await his coming as across a barrier.

He came to a halt before them and stood rigidly erect. He raised his battered sombrero in greeting to the girl. He did not look at Clyde. The latter moved his spirited horse a little so that he could loll in the saddle, facing Pete, at ease and smiling. A silver case flashed as he extracted a cigarette.

"Well," said Pete, "what's the play, Phoebe?"

"We didn't come over to pay a social call," began the girl.

"It's business," said Clyde. "That's the language you can understand, eh, old son?"

"Then we'd ought to get it over pronto," said Pete. He swung his unwinking gaze to Clyde, but continued to address the girl. "I've told this hombre, pointed, what would happen to him if he set foot on the Double O again. We'll make an exception this time, on account of the company he's in. How come you're traveling with him a-tall is one of them mysterious things. It's nothing to me, you savvy. Just curious."

"I'll tell you why," said the girl, flushing beneath his bluntness. "I'll speak plainly, too. You had almost convinced me, Pete, that you were entitled to my confidence. And friendship. In fact, I was on the verge of—of liking you immensely, until Clyde came to-day, just in time to convince me that you are as unscrupulous as he had always insisted. Even with me, I should say," she amended, hurriedly, her flush deepening, "that you made no exception in dealing with me. I had been flattering myself, of course, that you had an especial interest in my welfare."

"And he convinced you otherwise, huh?" Pete reached for the makings, his eyes bleak and bitter. "I knew he was a spellbinder, but I never gave him that much credit. Leave me ask you this. You sure you know all the facts?"

She nodded. "I know all about Foul Springs and Willow Creek. And how you juggled the titles to suit your own ends. That's what makes me feel so mortified. And childish. Like a babe in the woods." Her quickening breathing was a hint of inner, turbulent emotions. "You fooled me utterly. Notwithstanding that I had been warned against you. How you must have chuckled to yourself when I signed over Foul Springs to you at the recorder's office! It was by far the easiest 'trading' you had ever done, wasn't it?"

"Hm-m-m," said Pete, his brows knitting. "Just a second. You mean to

say that after finding out that Clyde pulled a plain, unadulterated swindle on you—trading you and yore folks out of everything you owned in exchange for a section of sand and rim rock that wouldn't support a jack rabbit—you're *still* able to believe anything he says? It don't seem reasonable, pop-eyed as gals are supposed to be."

"At least," said the girl, with spirit, "Clyde was man enough to confess wrongdoing and to hurry back to make restitution."

"Dog-gone," said Pete. He whistled slowly, eying Clyde almost with respect. "So that's the way the cards are falling. I'm beginning to see daylight in the swamps. Hombre, you're considerable of a trader yoreself, huh? When it comes to dealing with wimmin."

IF you'll pardon me," said Clyde to the girl with exaggerated courtesy, his full lip curling, "perhaps I'd better state the case myself. These traders are obnoxious to deal with. Particularly when they're fairly caught in their own trap. Old son"—he addressed Pete with a lazy contempt of manner that caused the hackles to rise on the latter's neck—"without indulging in undue personalities, this is the status quo, as the legal sharps say. Follow me closely now. And I hope your self-styled shrewdness will lead you to agree quickly to what we have to propose.

"When I left here, I was desperate. Absolutely penniless. Unless I raised funds quickly, I would starve——"

"Now here's a thought," interrupted Pete. "You couldn't get a job and earn an honest dollar, huh? You prob'ly busted out in a nervous rash at the very idea."

"Can't you let him tell his story?" accused the girl.

"Excuse it," said Pete. "Go on, mister."

"I won't go into the inner struggle against temptation when I met the Perkins family and they took me in," said Clyde loftily. "In brief, I yielded to that temptation. I took advantage of the fact that they had planned for years on coming to the high country. I took title to their valley property in exchange for Foul Springs. Yes, knowing it was worthless. I admit it. There was no excuse for it, except that I was desperate.

"But wait, old son. I repented immediately. Within twenty-four hours after I had sold the grocery store and house to the highest bidder, and was well-fed and prosperous once more, the scales fell from my eyes. I suffered the tortures of the damned. A picture of Phoebe—her trusting face—swam before me. I thought of her parents, deprived of resources in their old age. What to do? I had already spent a part of the six thousand I had received, you understand.

"Even if I hurried back and turned over to them all the cash I had left, they would still have suffered a staggering blow to their resources. Not to mention the shock to their hopes and dreams. It was pure torment, I say, until I had evolved a plan whereby I could more than make amends for their financial loss. It would put them in a position, in fact, where they could afford to buy the best and most productive section of land in the high desert."

"Yeah?" murmured Pete, the cigarette motionless on his lip. "This has a strangely interesting sound. The plot thickens, as them writing sharps say."

Subtly, the clash of wills was now between the men alone. The girl was an outsider. The gaze of the two brothers locked and held, Clyde's gloating and triumphant, Pete's watchful and twinkling with a species of frosty amusement.

"This was the plan," said Clyde. "I made myself known to capitalists down in Frisco. I interested a group of them in Foul Springs. I persuaded them to

come up and look it over. With the idea in mind of investing thousands in a health resort. Mineral baths of all that sort of thing. Don't try to look so surprised." He sneered. "Trust the quivering ears of a trader like you to find out a development like that before anybody else. You knew it as soon as they were on the ground, eh?"

"THAT'S why you tricked me into assigning Foul Springs over to you," accused the girl. "Don't deny it. You saw the chance of an immense profit. You could sell Foul Springs to these promoters for ten times its value. Even when Clyde explained it to me, I tried to believe that you had placed us on Willow Creek just to protect our interests. What a generous thing—a wonderful and noble thing—that would have been! But, no. You were looking out for Mr. Pete Hanley, as always."

"Dog-gone!" exclaimed Pete. "Clyde, you're a more slippery maverick than I give you credit for! Go on, hombre."

"That's all," said Clyde airily. "Except a little detail of hard-boiled business. I've got five thousand dollars in my pocket. Cash. I also have had drawn up a quit-claim deed to Foul Springs. I have it here. All I want from you is your signature to this deed, properly witnessed by a couple of your flea-bitten buckaroos. In exchange, I give you the five thousand. I wouldn't give you a red cent except for Phoebe. She insists that you're entitled to that much, crooked as you are, because you've given them title to Willow Creek. That's all," he repeated, flicking the ashes from his cigarette with a dainty finger. "And no argument."

"Hm-m-m," said Pete. "And suppose I won't?"

"Cinch," said Clyde. "You and the recorder are both thrown into the courts —and most probably into durance vile —for deliberately swindling Phoebe."

"Whereas it's some painful to know that you aim to turn right around and sell Foul Springs to them promoters for heavy money," Pete ruminated, squinting at the sky. "You've got me over a barrel. Yeah, looks like I'm hooked right. But we'll raise the ante, hombre. It'll cost you exactly six thousand."

"Oh!" cried the girl, in a suffocated voice. "You—you're insufferable! You haven't denied anything Clyde has said. You did deliberately juggle the titles so you could make a profit. And now—when you aren't entitled to a cent, when it was at my insistence that he even offered you five thousand——"

"Hush, Phoebe," Clyde soothed. "We won't argue with him. He's just that bull-headed that he'd ruin the whole deal unless we meet his demands. Fortunately, knowing in advance how grasping he is, I have the six thousand. I borrowed five hundred from a friend in town——"

"A tinhorn?" drawled Pete. "That's fine. You've donated twenty times five hundred to that sharp in the past."

"A friend," repeated Clyde, with a wrathful glance. He drew forth the deed and handed it to Pete. "Let's bring this session to a close. Fetch up your witnesses. Yes," he sneered, producing a bulging billfold. "I've got the cash. Read 'em and weep. Ten five-hundred-dollar notes. Ten hundreds. Let's go."

"One question," said Pete, squinting at the deed. "If all this is for the benefit of Phoebe, how come this deed's made out to you?"

"I'll answer that question," said Phoebe. "We're going to split the profits of the sale to the promoters. Clyde's entitled to half for his efforts in interesting them. The deed's made out to him because he's handling the deal. I trust him entirely."

At this last statement Pete turned savagely on his heel. He called loudly

for Hokum. That worthy came running from the distant cook shack.

"Sprint over to the pens and fetch a couple of lads who can sign their names," he directed. "Tell 'em to make dust."

Hokum loped away. Clyde regarded the girl smilingly. Her gaze was fixed on Pete, who had seated himself on the step and was scanning the deed. Her cheeks were more pale now. In her eyes were bitter puzzlement and wounded pride.

THE buckaroos hurried forward, wiping their hands on their dusty jeans. They grinned upon the girl and glowered at Clyde. Pete motioned them to his side.

"Sign here, and here," he directed.

"Boss," whispered one of the downright youths, yearningly. "A spell ago, you done made us a promise about that gilded lily. I don't know what business fetched him here, but as soon's it's over, what say we lead him gently over to the pens and houlihan him? I got a picture of grasping him by the face and makin' him snap like a whip, and it haunts me."

"No," said Pete bitterly. "They's a lady present. If she thinks he's a lolypop on wheels, who are we to spoil his play? All right, boys, scatter."

The buckaroos departed, muttering beneath their breath.

Pete handed the deed to Clyde. He took the cash, wadded it and thrust it into his jeans.

"And that's that," he said. There was no triumph in his bearing, though this was a moment long appraised in prospect. "Nice day, ain't it?"

Clyde reined away, his exultance written large on his grinning face, and motioned to the girl to follow.

"Come," he said, with a proprietory manner that caused the muscles to stand forth on Pete's lean jaw. "I'll leave you at your gate, Phoebe, and sprint on to town. We'll close the deal immediately. Ho!" he chortled, saluting Pete with an airy gesture of deliberate goading. "The master shark has been bitten plenty. And we get the gravy! Let's go."

But the girl held back. "Go on, Clyde," she said. "I want to talk to Pete."

"Excuse it," said Pete, as Clyde thundered away, raising his sombrero with a graceful flourish. "I ain't in the mood to talk to you, gal. Not now." He backed toward the pens, pulling his sombrero lower over his eyes. "Sorry. Busy that a way."

"Wait," said Phoebe. "Please. I want to ask you one question. Why didn't you make some excuse, defend yourself in some manner? It wasn't like you——"

"I make no excuses," said Pete. The words, spoken between his teeth, constituted his creed. "I offer no alibis. I cater to no one. Let the facts do the talking. They ain't through yet. Me, I'm done."

"But surely," the girl persisted, "you didn't deceive me just for cash alone! There's something inexplicable about all this. No, it isn't just wounded vanity on my part. When—when you said you had taken a shine to me, you sounded—sincere."

"Yeah," said Pete. "And as soon as somebody come along who talked louder and sweeter than me, it was something else again. Right away I'm a polecat. With the mange."

"But you're always talking about facts," protested the girl. "Isn't it a fact that Clyde is making generous restitution for all he's done? Isn't it a fact that he interested the promoters in Foul Springs?"

"He says so," said Pete.

"He sinned against us, but can you deny that he's making a tremendous effort to square himself again?"

"That's what he says," repeated Pete.

"Isn't it true that you took Foul Springs from me by fraud so that you could make a profit? That you've been looking out for your own interests from the first?"

"And again," said Pete, "you're referring to things that Clyde told you." He cast a significant glance over his shoulder toward the distant pens. "What else?"

"Oh!" said the girl, in wrath and bitterness. "When you want to be, you're so stubborn. And hard. What are some of the facts, then?"

"The fact is," said Pete, "that they's a flock of calves waiting to be branded over yonder. It's a further brutal truth that, polite and well-meaning savage that I am, I ain't in no shape at the minnit to argue no more. Even with a lady. Sho!" He grinned upon her suddenly, without mirth. "I hadn't ought to be so harsh this a way. It does seem that you're earnestly seeking light in them dark places. The only kick I got is to whom you go for yore information. Come back some other time, Phoebe, and we'll parley. When we ain't so het up as this. When I ain't battling an overpowering yen to bite off my own ears. Meanwhile, the said facts'll go marching on. See you again."

She looked at him steadily for a space, torn by conflicting emotions. But as he continued to back away, clothed by a lightness of manner more impervious than armor, she reined her horse about and slowly took her departure.

CHAPTER VI.

BIG STAKES.

AT sundown, Pete sat on the broad step, facing the driveway, whittling. It was the same spot where he had suffered his humiliating conference with Clyde and the girl in early forenoon. Meanwhile, his person had undergone a marked transformation. Freshly bathed and shaved, with a newly laundered hickory shirt incasing his lean shoulders and with points of light gleaming from spur and belt, he was again a sedately and immaculately clad person of range affairs.

In the cool of approaching twilight, the great ranch was quiet. Cows bawled on distant meadows. Horses nickered nearer at hand. These sounds served merely as a background to the peace that lay like a benediction upon the world. None of the usual joyful uproar came from the bunk house beyond the cook shack, the entire crew having departed for a swimming hole among the distant tules. Even Hokum—who was wont to proclaim loudly that he was one of those persons of character who could take a bath or leave it alone—had gone with the others. He, Pete, for the moment, at least, was sole guardian of the home ranch.

This suited his mood exactly. He was not given to premonitions or vague spiritual prophesies. Yet in this breathless hour, while color harmonies faded above the western mesa and a brooding calm lay upon the world, he felt in his bones that dramatic events were closing in upon him. It was just as well, under the circumstances, that his downright crew were not close at hand.

The trouble heralded by his sensitive bony system did not arise from a mere hunch. From where he sat, through a rift in the poplars, ribbonlike miles of the road leading northward to the Narrows were visible. Along this road a tiny funnel of dust was approaching.

He studied this dust and made out, presently, that it was preceded by a harness team, and a buckboard manned by a lone driver. As the minutes passed, and the approaching equipment grew larger, he identified the team. It was from the livery stable at Lodgepole. The driver was as yet unrecognizable. And because the poplars would presently intervene, he would be unable to identify the approaching one until the

buckboard rolled into the driveway close at hand.

More than that presently caught his eye. Far off toward the Narrows, another tiny dust cloud moved. Even at the distance, its steady forward progress was noticeable to the eye. It was undoubtedly a rider who reckoned not on the toll exacted from horseflesh at such sustained speed.

"Son of a gun!" Unconsciously he breathed his thoughts aloud. "The wheels is moving. First a buckboard sprinting hither. Then a gent riding his horse plumb into the ground. Yeah, the wolves is closing in."

"Are you still so mad that you're talking to yourself?" demanded a quiet, musical voice at his elbow.

He whirled, stifling an exclamation. Phoebe, having rounded the corner of the patio at his right, had drawn near unobserved.

"I didn't mean to startle you," she apologized as he leaped to his feet. "I came over through the orchard. I had a notion to say 'Boo' when you didn't see me coming. Then I heard you muttering something that sounded like profanity, and I was too embarrassed. Were you swearing at me?"

He shook his head. She was pale and somewhat breathless. She seated herself on the step, hugging her knees. She was still in the trim riding habit that he had admired that morning. He thought that she had never seemed more beautiful than in this moment. She met his gaze for an instant—searchingly, almost wistfully—then looked away.

"I'm quite persistent, don't you think?" she said. "It would seem that I have no pride at all. But you are proud, too. So I came over anyway. I hope you will talk to me now. I've been thinking a lot to-day about what you said. About facts. You haven't explained a lot of things. You don't seem to value my opinion. But I'll tell you this. You have done a lot for us. You did deed us Willow Creek. You gave us stock and equipment at ridiculous prices. I'd temporarily forgotten that."

"Still giving the devil his due, huh, Phoebe?" He spoke in his old quizzical manner. Still standing, he was looking out across the flat at the approaching horseman. The rattle of the buckboard was nearer at hand.

"Listen," he continued swiftly. "We can't talk now. Things is approaching a show-down. They's some folks coming. I don't want 'em to know you're here. Just step inside the door yonder. Stand in the shadow, where you can't be seen, and listen. Like I said before, I'm through talking. Through, by the eternal! You got to be shown. I got a hunch you'll get an earful."

Even in this hurried moment, when the sound of the buckboard was loud in the driveway, he permitted himself a bitter thrust. "It'll sound better from somebody else. You'll believe it, I reckon, as long as it ain't me. Listen close. Don't show yoreself, no matter what happens. Hurry along, now!" Stooping, he raised her up. "No argument!"

HE spoke so forcefully that she obeyed with haste, bewildered and overawed. She had just disappeared into the shadow of the open door across the patio when the buckboard rolled into view.

To Pete's amazement, the driver was Lafe. That his bosom friend was in a state of excitement was plain. He glowered upon Pete as his lathered horses slid to a halt.

"You're a noble, pop-eyed Santa Claus, ain't you?" was his opening accusation. "Folks like you had ought to be in one of them institutions. Or in a cage, by gravy, swinging by the tail and making faces at the other apes. Hombre, I've done drove from town just for the privilege of telling you what a

horse collar you are. Get set, now, and hang on, because I shorely aim to knock yore ears down."

"Sho," said Pete, unimpressed by these threats. "What ails you, Lafe?"

"Plenty," said the other. "How come you let Clyde play you for a wall-eyed pike? He come fogging into town today, making his brags about how he'd euchered Foul Springs out of you again for a measly six thousand!"

"Well?" said Pete, grinning, his eyes fixed on the approaching horseman.

"Ha!" snorted Lafe. "You stand there and say, 'Well?' That's just yore caliber. Don't you know Clyde aims to turn that deed over to them health-resort sharks for twenty thousand? Don't you know you've played smack into his hands on the whole layout? Don't you know the whole range'll give you the horse laugh?" He spread his hands in a piteous gesture. "Don't you know *nothing?*"

"Lafe," said Pete. "Climb off that buckboard pronto and step up here beside me."

Lafe leaped down, caught by an inflection in the other's quiet voice.

"Look!" said Pete, pointing. "What do you see?"

"A feller on a hoss," said Lafe. "It's my horse, by gravy! From the stable. And that's Clyde! You wouldn't know him at that distance except for his trick outfit. How come he's running my critter into the ground like that? What's he burning up the dust out here again for?"

"Lafe." Pete grinned, laying an affectionate hand on the other's arm. "I'm some surprised that you done lost faith in me again. It's a habit you got when things look shaky, huh? But let it pass. I dunno what ails Clyde. But I got my suspicions. If you'll just hold yore thundering horses of curiosity for a minnit longer, all them mysteries will be cleared up. Clyde'll tell us himself. In his own elegant way.

"Now listen, ol' son. I'm glad you're here. I didn't expect you, but now that you're on the job, we'll make use of you. Horse yore broncs over yonder where they're hid from view. Clyde's prob'ly seen you ahead of him on the flat, but he'll figger you're one of my hands getting home. When you've parked yore outfit, sprint back and take yore stand behind that bush." He indicated a huge shrub directly across the driveway before the step. "If Clyde knew he had a gallery, he couldn't talk straight for the life of him."

"I'll do it," said Lafe, instantly impressed. "And I'll watch him like a hawk. I don't know what it's all about, pardner, but don't take no lip from that buzzard. If you got any qualms about working him over, just give me the high sign. I'll be happy to oblige."

"The world's full of problems," said Pete. "I'm playing for big stakes, Lafe. Don't you show up till the finish. 'Less he figgers he's got plenty of room, he won't spread himself. Drag, ol' son."

Lafe leaped into the buckboard and departed with haste. The drumming of the approaching horse's hoofs were loud on the still air.

Pete stretched himself, yawning, his lean frame turned toward the shadows of the patio.

"Facts, lady." His vibrant whisper belied his languid pose. "Read 'em and weep. Ain't this a natural stage? Heavy drama, by gravy. Me and Clyde going on trial. And the judges setting on the side lines. Yeah, keep cool. Don't move."

"I'm afraid, Pete," came the girl's shaken reply. "Something terrible is going to happen. Clyde hates you. He told me——"

"Hush," said Pete. "Here he comes. You asked for it, and you're getting it. You had to be shown. You always was a hand to listen to Clyde. Don't miss a word."

Turning, he lowered himself upon the

step and took up the crooked stick upon which he had previously been whittling. He was examining his handiwork with a critical eye, whistling between his teeth, when Clyde's lathered horse labored into view.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SHOW-DOWN.

THAT the rider was in the grip of grim and furious emotions was plain. His contorted features were pallid in the fading light, his jaw outthrust. Beneath the lowered brim of his resplendent sombrero, the whites of his eyes gleamed. His entrance upon the quiet scene was similar to the abrupt exploding of a storm.

Reined back cruelly, the jaded mount slid to a halt before the steps. Clyde swung down from the saddle, flinging the reins clear. He struck the horse on its trembling flank, and the animal stumbled on into the shadows. He faced Pete on legs firmly planted and pushed back his hat.

"Howdy," said Pete, squinting up at the other. "Beautiful evening, ain't it?"

Clyde made no reply to this drawled greeting. His baleful eyes peered about him slowly, at the quiet ranch house, at the shadowed grounds in which the sound of his turbulent coming seemed to roll on in subsiding echoes. He cocked his head, listening; but save for the blowing of his spent horse in the farther gloom, the great ranch seemed to be holding its breath. He nodded with satisfaction, teeth bared. He took a step closer to Pete and stood, arms folded, his right hand thrust beneath his beaded jacket.

"Alone, eh?" he said. "That's fine. We'll have a pleasant li'le parley, undisturbed."

Pete leaned back, extending his lean legs restfully. He laid his whittling aside and produced the makings. He rolled a cigarette with expert fingers, lighted it and flicked the match away.

"Shoot," he said. "What's on yore mind, Clyde?"

"Plenty," said Clyde. "There's something fishy about this layout on which I crave light. If things are the way I suspect, you and me are going to have a reckoning. Right now. *Muy pronto.*"

In the stress of the moment, it was plain, he was returning to the dialect of his boyhood. It was reversion that was somehow not good to look upon.

"Proceed, mister," said Pete, puffing at his cigarette.

"We'll make it short and sweet," said Clyde. "You framed me on this Foul Springs deal, huh?"

"Framed you?" queried Pete. "Dog-gone. I thought you figgered all the while that you was framing me."

"Talk straight," said Clyde between his teeth. "And fast. There's no pop-eyed girl to play up to, hanging on your every word. It's just you and me. And it's brass tacks. When I got back to town to-day, those promoters were gone. Flew the coop. Vamosed. Left word down at the hotel that they'd changed their minds. Just like that! And there I was, blast you, with the deed to Foul Springs. For which I'd just paid you six thousand in cold cash."

"Sho!" said Pete.

"Don't kid me," said Clyde furiously. "Those promoters were friends of yours, eh?"

"Why," said Pete, with a pretense of mild surprise. "I thought you told Phoebe that they was yore particular pets. Met 'em down in Frisco, by gravy. When you was overcome by remorse that a way. You rounded 'em up, fetched 'em up here and sold 'em on the theory that Foul Springs——"

"Bah!" said Clyde. "To blazes with Phoebe! To blazes with all that penny-ante stuff! I never laid eyes on those sharks until I came back to Lodgepole

and found them inquiring around. You planted 'em there, huh? Fixed it so I'd run smack into 'em and get sold on the idea I could make a lot more jack, isn't that right? Answer yes or no. Then"—he shifted his folded arms a little, thrusting his right hand deep beneath his leather jacket—"we'll proceed to heftier business."

"Since I'm on the witness stand this a way," said Pete, blowing the ash from his cigarette and eying the glowing end critically, "leave me answer questions in a way that'll get to the heart of it. Before admitting that those said promoters weren't what they seemed, let me call yore attention to the fact that the cash you brought to Lodgepole had been euchered out of Phoebe and her ace-high folks——"

"Don't kid me, I tell you!" said Clyde, his voice hoarse with passion. "This is no time for grandstanding. Running across Phoebe and her pop-eyed folks was just like finding money right where it grew. They were suckers made to order. To blazes with 'em. You planted those promoters in Lodgepole, huh?"

PETE nodded. "They was friends of mine. From the stockyards down in Portland. I wired 'em as soon as I'd gotten the deed to Foul Springs from Phoebe. They was happy to oblige." He sighed. "Only thing is, I was out three hundred expense money."

"Ha!" said Clyde. "Now we're getting down to the meat of it. You done this just to give me the horse laugh, huh? Just to let folks know that the patient, long-suffering, sanctimonious ol' polecat that li'le brother Clyde has gouged all these years can win on the last play, is that it?"

"No," said Pete. "There's two reasons why I framed you, Clyde. Here's one of 'em. When Phoebe and her folks showed up here, the proud owners of title to Foul Springs, which they'd never seen, I was between the devil and the deep sea. I'd spent heavy money in the past five years, covering yore trail and——"

"Don't preach," snarled Clyde. "Don't I know that sermon by heart? The Hanley name is supposed to draw water in these parts. Our beloved parents helped pioneer the range. They were proud of the Double O. I'm the black sheep. You're the noble offspring that has bore the torch aloft. It's cost you plenty to hold the Double O together. The blasted ranch is mortgaged to the hilt on account of me. I've danced, and you've paid the piper. Yeah, I know that song to the last quavering verse. But it's out of place here, ol' son."

"Clyde," said Pete, almost in awe, "ain't they nothin' a-tall that is sacred to you? Don't it draw no water with you that our folks worked their hands to the bone getting a start together for us? Don't you savvy that their reputation as good citizens was built up stone by stone, and they went to their graves firm in the belief that they'd done right by us and the world, and their good name would still stand after they was gone, like one of them marble halls? Don't a consideration of them things mean *nothing* to you?"

"Not a blasted thing," said Clyde brutally. "The folks lived their own lives, and I'll live mine. Let their bones rest."

"It ain't possible," said Pete, "that you're crooked through and through. If so, I been placing my bets wrong. Up to this deal, it was only me that you gouged consistent. And yore own immortal soul. Leave me ask you this. Didn't you have no qualms a-tall when it come to roping in other innocent folks? Real folks, you savvy. Like Phoebe's paw and maw. And Phoebe. Trusting that a way. You figgering on having the whole blasted world pay the tariff from now on? Think hard now.

This is yore last chance to lay holt on things worth while."

He spoke with feeling, his lean features glistening. His obvious emotion merely served to add to Clyde's rage.

"Bah!" he grated. "You set there and squall like a weaned calf about Phoebe and her witless parents! They're free, white and twenty-one, ain't they? If I hadn't trimmed 'em, somebody else would. And don't you talk to me about last chances, hombre. It's me that's dealing the cards now. All this preaching and crawfishing and belly-aching is beside the point. I've picked my trail, and you nor nobody else is going to tell me how to ride it. Now, then——"

"Wait!" said Pete. "Don't the fact that Phoebe had faith in you mean nothing a-tall? That she believed all you told her? That she believed you was one of them sincere, straightforward lads—even after she *knew* you'd swindled her once? Don't it make you feel kind of funny inside when you think of a gal like that?"

"Gals?" replied Clyde with searing contempt. "The woods is full of 'em. I pluck 'em like grapes. Sure, her faith meant something to me. Six thousand iron men! She would have been worth plenty more to me if those blasted, swivel-jointed, promoting sharks hadn't been dummies playing your game. Which brings us down to our li'le deal, ol' son. In which there's a card or two yet to play."

"No," said Pete. He placed his cigarette on the step and ground it beneath his heel. "You may have some more talking to do, Clyde. But no dealings. You and me is through. Henceforth, we're strangers."

"Yeah?" said Clyde. He glanced about him swiftly, then his unwinking gaze returned to Pete. "You think so, huh?"

"I've gone the limit," said Pete. "For you, and to protect the family name. With respect to Phoebe and her folks, I've done my duty according to my lights." He grinned mirthlessly and spoke as to an unseen auditor. "It's a thankless job. But such as it is, my haywire work's done. She and her folks have Willow Creek, which is the place they want. I've got six thousand, which is less than Willow Creek's worth. But I ain't complaining. You've got Foul Springs, which is where you started from. So everybody had ought to be happy." He arose slowly to his gaunt height, jerked a thumb toward the north. "Get off the ranch. Get out of the country. Never come back."

BUT Clyde did not move. He seemed positively to swell with wrath, to gain sinister proportions. They regarded each other steadily for a space while the very air seemed torn with conflicting forces.

"Pete," said Clyde, at length in a choked voice. "You're through, huh? That's finè. Now listen to me. Up to this deal, I've had the bulge on you. I've rode you ragged and made you like it. But you figgered you'd outfoxed me on the last play, huh? Figgered you'd get all the gravy and the gal, too? Guess again, hombre. I'm just the kind of a crookled gambler who keeps an ace in the hole. You think I rode out here just to parley with you? No, no, ol' son——"

In that instant, Pete sensed—too late—that he had underestimated the quality of the other's malignant potentialities. With a dramatic gesture—the kind of drama where Death draws nearer the wings awaiting his cue—Clyde unfolded his arms, crouching a little. In his right hand was a heavy six-gun, and the muzzle of this weapon fixed unwaveringly upon the third button of Pete's hickory shirt.

"You figger on everything," said Clyde between his teeth. His contorted

face was that of a killer. "Nothing ever really surprises you. What about this?"

"Hm-m-m," said Pete softly. "An armpit holster, huh? It's just yore caliber. No, I'm not surprised. That's the ace you mentioned, I take it. What does it say, Clyde? My scalp?"

"Maybe," said Clyde. "But first, I want that six thousand simoleons. You got 'em cached somewhere. Inside the house, huh? Dig 'em up. It'll save me the trouble. Move fast, now——"

"Listen," said Pete. "This here's a holdup, you savvy. If you slaughter me in cold blood, do you think for a minnit you'd get out of the country alive? Just stop to figger——"

"Squirm, blast you!" grated the other. "Talk to save yore measly scalp! Figger plenty. But not now. Get going, hombre. Have I got to drill you where you stand?"

Pete shrugged his shoulders and took a step backward. His parley had been for the purpose of permitting Lafe to draw closer. That worthy, having slipped his high-heeled boots from his feet, had quitted his place of concealment and was stealing softly upon Clyde from the rear.

"Keep yore hands up," directed Clyde harshly. "No funny moves a-tall. The jack's in the safe, huh? Go straight to it and——"

He likewise took a step forward, tense and poised, his feet rattling in the gravel. Under cover of this noise, Lafe threw caution to the winds and hurtled forward in a prodigious leap. He struck down Clyde's gun arm and bore him to earth. The weapon exploded, the bullet ricocheted from the stone arch at Pete's elbow. The latter dived from the top step into the fray.

The struggle was brief but terrific. Clyde battled with the fury of a madman, but was speedily overcome. His hands tied by Lafe's bandanna, he lay, winded and gasping, sobbing threats and incredibly foul blasphemies in a hoarse, bestial voice.

"Shut up!" said Pete bluntly. "Or we'll gag you. No call for anybody to listen to that kind of talk. Lafe, you done noble. You danged ol' walrus, I didn't know you had that much speed in you! Yeah, when it comes to a pinch, you're a large-sized crowd."

"I'd have rushed him before," averred Lafe, puffing with his exertions, "except he'd have heard me coming. I knew he was heeled. I could see the gun bulging the leather from the back. He had his hand on his artillery all the while, which is why he talked up to you so hard-boiled! Dog-gone, you're a spectacle, Clyde. Figgered he was alone and at yore mercy, huh?"

"Clyde," said Pete. "Listen close. You're some wrought up at the minnit. But ponder what I'm telling you later. You're going back to town with Lafe. In his buckboard. With yore horse led behind——"

"And if that critter's wind-broke from the way you run him out here," promised Lafe, "you'll never get to town. I'll just show folks where I buried you and keep yore scalp as a souvenir."

"You'll get to town about ten," Pete continued. "At eleven, they's a stock train pulling west to Frisco. Nail it and keep traveling. Here's fifty bucks I'm giving Lafe, which he'll put in yore pocket when he personally sees you aboard the caboose."

JUST a second," said Lafe, scandalized. "Pete, they's times when I figger you're feeble-minded. You mean to say you're giving this polecat another chance? Why not turn him over to the sheriff? You don't have to go back into ancient history for enough to put him behind bars. They ain't a jury in the high desert but would give him the limit just for percentage when I testify on the witness stand that

he pulled a gun on you, held you up and threatened to murder you in cold blood! What you holding back for? You *still* figger they's an ounce of real beef in him that's worth salvaging?"

"How about it, Clyde?" said Pete.

"If anybody ever catches me back in this tick-infested and polecat-ridden wilderness," muttered Clyde, sullen and smoldering, "they can shoot me on sight."

"Now there you are!" said Lafe. "That's what I call a prize statement from a humble and well-meaning gent who aims to do better! He's learned his lesson, by gravy, and is so plumb full of those noble sentiments his eyes is stickin' out." He snorted wrathfully. "He ain't learned nothing and proud of it."

"Just the same," Pete insisted, "we'll give him the benefit of the doubt. I'll tell you this, Clyde. Study over it later. One more funny move from you, any more crooked work, any time you set foot in Lodgepole again and can't prove you're earning an honest living, and I'll make it my personal and unpleasant business to put you behind bars. Get me? All right, Lafe, get yore buckboard and hurry this pilgrim away. I ain't got stomach for this business no more. It gripes me."

The two brothers waited in the driveway while Lafe departed for the buckboard. Clyde was sullen, morose, obviously unrepentant. Pete's lean features were bleak and hard. From the position where they stood, the latter saw the girl's figure framed in the semidarkness of the doorway. Her face was pale, as at the memory of late horror.

Looking at her, Pete's bitterness of heart was rendered the more galling by the thought that destruction of her faith in Clyde had wrought thus upon her emotions. Because he had no desire to add further to Clyde's humiliation, and also because he shrank inwardly from the inevitable meeting with her and sought thus to postpone it, he motioned her peremptorily to remain hidden. She hesitated, then drew back.

Lafe arrived with the buckboard and the led horse, in more genial mood.

"The critter ain't damaged none, I reckon," he announced. "We'll take it easy back to town. Help this citizen in, Pete, and gimme his artillery. I'll see him safe on the train. Adios, ol' son. Don't give that Phoebe gal half a chance, or she'll certainly put her brand on you!"

His ears burning at this unfortunate remark, Pete watched the buckboard swing around the curve of the driveway. Lafe flung up his arm in jovial farewell. Clyde sat hunched, looking neither to the right nor the left. They were gone. Their echoes dwindled in the distance.

Pete turned back toward the shadowed patio. The girl came down to meet him, smiling.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TRADER.

AS always, in moments of stress, Pete mechanically reached for the makings. Yet his somber features revealed nothing as his lighted match flared in the semidarkness. He did not look at the girl, standing at his side. He peered about him at the deepening shadows beneath the trees. He squinted at the sky, where the gleam of jeweled stars strengthened on the heels of sunset.

"Well, Phoebe," he said. "It's getting late. Yore folks'll be wondering where you're at. You'd best run along now, huh?"

"I will," she said meekly, "if you'll go with me. It's awfully dark in the orchard."

Side by side they moved forth upon lush grass that was like a dim aisle between the vague bulk of whispering

trees. A cool night wind had sprung up. From afar off, to their right, came its murmur among the tules, and all about them was the fragrance, the freshness and witchery that follows sundown in the high desert.

Though Pete looked straight ahead, his cigarette glowing in the gloom, he was acutely conscious of the girl, her nearness, her pale, upturned face. It was, in fact, as though the center of the world—the dreams, the aspirations, the yearning hopes of the world—moved forward with him, through the whispering shadows, side by side.

"Well, Phoebe," he said at length, in an offhand manner. "I promised you plenty facts. They passed in review, I reckon."

"They did," she agreed. "But they didn't surprise me so much as you thought they would, Pete."

"No?"

"No."

"Excuse it," he said. "It's easy to say so, after you've been shown."

The going was rougher underfoot. She clung to his arms.

"You didn't give me a chance before. When I came over this morning with—with Clyde, I expected you to deny a lot of things he said. About you getting title to Foul Springs from me, because it was valuable. You couldn't deny it, of course, without arousing his suspicions. But I didn't know that. I—I stayed, after he was gone, to give you another chance. But you were too mad."

He made no reply. Dim in the shadows ahead loomed the ancient split-rail fence separating the orchard from Willow Creek.

"I came back again to-night, but you wouldn't listen. You still insisted I was just giving the devil his due. Then Clyde came."

Still he said nothing. He paused to grind out his cigarette beneath his heel, then strode on. He glanced at her fleetingly, dubiously, and saw that she was smiling.

"You're proud, aren't you?" Her voice was soft. "Or is it just stubbornness? In that terrible moment, when I thought Clyde was going to shoot you, I almost screamed. But you told me to stay hidden, to remain quiet whatever happened. Then I saw Lafe coming. Do you know why I wanted to come down while Clyde was there, that time you waved me back?"

"To scorch Clyde's ears, I reckon."

"No." She shivered. "I didn't think he was all bad like that. But I'm not a child, Pete—even if I do act like one at times. Do you think I trusted him after I knew he'd swindled us at the beginning? I only came over with him because he'd painted you so black. Well, when you motioned to me to stay hidden, I was coming down to ask Clyde a question or two. For your benefit. About what I had said to him before we came over together. When we were talking about you. But it's too late to tell you now, isn't it?" She laughed a little, somewhat breathlessly. "Like me, you have to be shown?"

THEY had come to a split-rail fence. He helped her up, mounted up slowly beside her. They perched thus, side by side, looking out on Willow Creek. Squares of light shone from the ancient homestead. They heard a woman's singing, faint and far away. Oddly melodious it was, muted by distance and intervening walls, breathing of peace, tranquility, security, like a voice interpreting the exultant mood of night and moment.

"Listen to yore maw sing!" murmured Pete. "Like a weary pilgrim that's home at last. Like she'd doubted it all her life, and here she was in the midst of it, neck deep. Go ahead, Phoebe, gal. When you was talking about me, what did you say?"

"I'm not sure that I want to tell you

now," she said, looking up at him with a roguish imitation of his own quizzical manner. "It's—awfully personal. Listen, Pete. When you told me—that first day—that you'd taken a shine to me, did you mean it?"

"Sho!" said Pete. "You should ask me that! Yeah, proceed with confidence, lady."

"Help me down, first," she said.

He swung to the ground. He turned to her, and she placed her hands upon his shoulders. Thus, momentarily, as he lifted her down, she was in his arms. She did not draw away, and Pete, taking note of this incredible fact, drew her closer.

"I'm really quite athletic," she whispered, her laughing face upturned. "I could have managed it myself. But I needed encouragement. And you're so —so backward!"

"Dog-gone!" said Pete. "Consider yoreself encouraged, lady. And hurry on."

"Clyde accused me of taking a shine to you, too," she said. "And I admitted it. He said you had made use of that fact, that you were such a trader that you used anything at all that suited your purposes. So I said I'd come over with him and you'd deny the whole thing. Do you wonder that I was what you'd call flabbergasted? I could have died of mortification when you talked to us both so—so hard-boiled. Standing there so straight and tall and strong—a real man, one who wasn't afraid to work, who had done big things, who wasn't ashamed of sweat and dust—and Clyde gloating over you, grinning.

"I wanted so much to have you say that Clyde was utterly wrong. I wanted you to look at me in the kindly way you always had, perhaps with—with admiration, because I had on these riding clothes I brought with me from the valley, and I thought I looked nice in them. I wanted you to show Clyde that you and I stood together and that he was an outsider. But instead, you didn't deny anything. You looked at me without a sign of friendliness, as if we were strangers."

"Dog-gone," Pete swore. "How come, lady, that you rode me so rough from the first? Like I was a prickly pear against which you'd got to defend yoreself regardless?"

"You may be a shrewd trader, Mr. Pete Hanley," she said. "But when it comes to women, you're one of those babes in the woods. I was warned against you, but as soon as I saw you, your rugged, homely face and your kindly eyes and—and your smile, I knew that Clyde must be mistaken, that he was terribly prejudiced. I fought against believing in you, but everything seemed to prove that my preconceived ideas of you were wrong.

"You weren't so kind to us just because we were neighbors. Folks down in Lodgepole wouldn't look up to you like they did unless you were the kind of man who casts a shadow, as they say here. And when Clyde came back, so suave and glib and smiling, I was sure then that—that you were the real beef. I didn't have to be shown when I came over to-night. I would have been happy to believe you if you had told me all that Clyde revealed—yourself.

"But listen to me talk!" She hid her face, abashed. "You've made me admit everything. And you haven't told me a single nice thing for—for a long time."

"A good trader," stated Pete exultantly, "lets the other gent talk himself into a jack pot. You're sunk right, lady! Try to get out of a deal now! Yeah, listen close——"

"Careful, Mr. Hanley," she warned, in a muffled voice. "Remember what Lafe said when he went away. Give me half a chance—wasn't that it? But continue, sir. You were about to say that——"

"I was about to say," said Pete, "that you ain't learned yet how good a trader

I turned out to be. I've had some skullduggery in mind all the while with regard to Willow Creek. You've no idea what a scheming villain I am. You'd be surprised."

"I don't doubt it. What was it, Pete?"

"Willow Creek," stated Pete impressively, "is the best section in the whole Double O. You think for a minnit I ever figgered on letting it out of my clutches? No, by gravy. It's just naturally one of them things that ain't to be contemplated."

"But I have title to it." She laughed up at him with pretended puzzlement, lips half parted. "How get it back?"

"Cinch," said Pete. "It's my biggest deal. Figgered on it from the first. I'll marry it back."

An Absorbing Novel, "TREASURE WELL," by GEORGE OWEN BAXTER, in Next Week's Issue.

SNOWDRIFT DOES NOT BOTHER HEN

A SETTING hen belonging to Mr. and Mrs. Howard Towle, Belleville, Kansas, was not at all disturbed when she was snowed in during a severe storm early this spring. As hens often do, she had stolen her nest and had determined to keep the secret until her chicks appeared. The day after the storm some one heard a sound like the peeping of baby chickens under a snowdrift and immediately began to dig about until he finally unearthed the proud but snow-covered mother hen with six healthy chickens under her wings. Much to her displeasure, the hen was moved to a more comfortable location.

FIRE AIDS TREE GROWTH

ACCORDING to reports of the United States Forest Products Laboratory, forest fires have aided the growth of the aspen, for the aspen propagates by aid of fire.

Before the day of cutting and forest fires, the aspen must have been very much in the background but, with the coming of these two seemingly destructive features, the old growth was destroyed and from their roots came suckers in a radius of twenty-five or thirty feet around each of the trees that had been destroyed with twenty to thirty suckers to a stem. Thus every fire that has burned over an area has greatly increased the growth of the aspen. Practically all of the enormous area overgrown with aspen in the northern Lake States is the result of forest fires.

In northern Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota thousands of acres of land are forfeited every year for taxes because they have a dense brush growth of aspen. Unfortunately the value of aspen growth has been greatly underestimated in spite of the fact that laboratory tests and commercial practice have demonstrated the suitability of aspen wood for crating and boxing materials, excelsior, pulpwood, and many other uses. In Europe aspen is used almost entirely for matches. As the pulping processes are improved, more and more uses will be found for aspen. Already over four hundred thousand cords of aspen are converted each year into paper pulp in this country.

CHECHAHCO PARTNER

By KENNETH GILBERT

Author of "Cutthroat Catch," etc.

JIM Frayne peered closely at the black sand in the bottom of his gold pan, holding it to the full glare of the sunlight. But it was merely black sand—not a trace of the magic yellow of gold. With a grunt of disgust, he rinsed the pan, picked up his shovel and started back toward camp.

"A blank," he told himself. "The whole blamed piece of ground I've staked is a blank. Good pay dirt all around, for the other boys are getting it, but nary a speck of dust here.

"What'll I say to the Kid?" That, in itself, seemed to cause him more concern than did the fact that fortune had delt him a deuce instead of an ace.

Below the bench along which the trail led was the mushroom gold camp of Malemute, a tent town as yet, for only the first rush of stampeders had reached the place. On the next trip of the river boat up the Yukon, however, the camp would be choked with other gold seekers. Now it was scarcely less raw than the wilderness which it had supplanted there on the Porcupine, not far

from where that stream emptied into the Yukon.

Jim Frayne's own tent was down there, and his young partner, the "Siwash Kid," would be waiting. Theirs was a strange comradeship—that of a seasoned prospector and a chechahco youngster from the "outside," who was getting his first taste of the red meat of adventure.

Frayne had found the boy, "siwashing" through the country without food or outfit, and had brought him to Three Below, after learning that the lad had been robbed by Bart Laidlaw, a gambler. From Three Below, the pair had come to Malemute.

Just why big Jim Frayne, who had always played a lone hand, had taken this mere boy as a partner, was something the veteran stampeder could not have clearly explained.

For one thing, however, Frayne hated Bart Laidlaw, and the latter had victimized the Kid. Likewise, Frayne probably had a sort of wondering admiration for the Kid's unshakable faith and courage. There was, too, some wild, untamable streak in the boy's nature—the greenish flecks in his eyes when aroused were like those of a fighting wolf—and Frayne found response in his own soul.

Their first meeting, the clash of the two, had proved to Frayne that the lad had a spirit which never would be broken. The Kid had qualities which Frayne had never found in a man, and in return the Kid saw in Frayne that which he instinctively worshiped.

Moreover, when the Kid had later thwarted Laidlaw's attempt to steal the "ice pool" at Three Below—money wagered by the prospectors on the exact time the spring break-up of the Yukon would occur—then not only did the boy avenge himself, but Frayne likewise won a thousand dollars from the gambler, who fled to escape the wrath of the prospectors whom he had tried to trick.

So, Frayne and the Siwash Kid had stampeded to Malemute, which had come to life on the site of a gold strike made ten years before, but soon abandoned. Now, however, rich pay dirt had been found in the old workings, and Malemute revived suddenly.

"Rather take a licking than tell the Kid I've failed here," reflected Frayne, as he moved down the trail. "The Kid won't say much, but he'll look at me kind o' queerlike!" Without stopping to reason why, the man cherished the Kid's good opinion of him more than he did anything else.

OFF to the left, Frayne suddenly saw another man moving up the gulch. A stranger in Malemute, for Frayne knew every prospector there. Then he remembered the other as Ferris, one of Bart Laidlaw's crowd at Three Below. The man carried a pack, as well as a rifle. For a moment, Frayne was puzzled.

"Steamer must have got up as far as the mouth of the Porcupine," he deduced finally. "She'll be up here to-morrow, when the river clears of driftwood." The heavy rains of the last few days had strewn the stream with uprooted trees, but now the weather was settled. "Ferris must have got off, and mushed ahead.

"But why? Laidlaw wouldn't have nerve enough to show up here now. This crowd would make short work of him. Must have sent Ferris instead!"

The newcomer acted queerly, as though he was searching for something. Once he stopped to examine a small pile of stones—the monument which marked the corner of a claim staked years before. But this apparently didn't satisfy him; he went on, finally vanishing up a side canyon.

Frayne shrugged, as he went on down the trail.

"Kind o' curious," he remarked. "Ferris is tough timber; he'd have to be

to show up in Malemute. That's why Laidlaw picked him out to spy the country. But what's back of it?"

He hadn't found the answer to that question by the time he reached his tent. Moreover, he was concerned just now with the excuse he'd have to make to his partner that the claim which had been carefully chosen was barren of gold. With a sigh of relief, he discovered that the Kid wasn't in the tent. The fire in the stove was out; the Kid evidently had been away for some time.

On the table, however, was a fragment of paper, torn from the wrapping of a side of bacon. It was a note, written in pencil, from the Kid. It began with the usual term with which the Kid irreverently addressed his partner.

PALOOKA: You've made a fizzle of it. I've known the truth for days, so save your fairy stories. I've been trying to show you up, but not until now have I had a chance. Somebody has to go out and get the gold, and I guess it must be me, seeing that you've failed. Get your own supper, and don't wait up for me. I may be away for some time!

Jim Frayne grinned, even though his brows wrinkled in a puzzled frown. The note was characteristic of the boy—confident, self-assured, disrespectful as always. To the Kid it seemed no feat to go out and pick up a handful of nuggets. In some manner, his quick intuition had read defeat in Jim Frayne and, boylike, he had dramatically determined to save the day.

Frayne stepped outside, and called the prospector who lived in the next tent.

"Where's the Kid, Simmons?"

The other smiled. "Saw him heading off up the gulch about three hours ago," was the reply. "Had him a gold pan and shovel and an ax. Yep, and that nickel-plated gun he allus carries. Asked him, innercentlike, if he wouldn't bring me back a grizzly's pelt for my bunk, and what he said to me, in reply, I ain't goin' to repeat. Associating with a dog-team driver like yourself doesn't seem to have helped his vocabulary none, if you ask me!"

"I didn't ask you!" retorted Jim Frayne severely. "Anyway you leave that boy alone. He'll grow up one of these days, and trim your ears!"

FRAYNE went back into his own tent, and got a fire going. There was no doubt in his mind that the Kid would be back by dark. He was off on some fool prospecting trip of his own, and by the time the sun dropped behind the hills, and the air of the canyons grew chilly, he'd be thinking of camp and a hot supper.

But darkness came, and Frayne ate alone. Still, he was not worried, even though he realized that the Kid was a greenhorn. It was not likely that anything could happen to him unless, by accident, he came afoul of one of the big bears which haunted the creeks, looking for the spring run of salmon.

Frayne cleaned up his work, then went visiting among the other prospectors, confidently expecting that when he returned, he'd find the Kid at home. He decided that he'd say nothing about the note, to relieve the youngster of as much embarrassment as possible.

When eleven o'clock came, however, and the others were ready for bed, Frayne discovered that the Kid was still missing.

The man was frankly worried now. And yet, he told himself, probably without reason. The boy might have decided to spend the night alone in the hills, for the thrill of it.

Anyway, so far as Jim could see, there was nothing to be done about it. If he set out on a search now, arousing the camp to help him, and the Kid was found to be safe and sound at some camp of his own, the humiliation of it would endure indefinitely. Not only would the prospectors crack jokes about it, but the Kid himself would never forget the implied insult.

Frayne went to bed, and sleep came at last, although it was troubled and fitful slumber. Half a dozen times he awakened, and his hands groped over the Kid's blankets, but the youth had not returned.

It still lacked an hour of dawn when Frayne decided that he couldn't endure the suspense any longer. After all, the Kid was a greenhorn, and there were many things that could have happened to him in the hills. Frayne would search for him alone, without notifying anybody else in camp. And when he found the Kid, he'd give that young man a dressing-down to be remembered.

Having hurriedly put on his clothes, Frayne picked up his carbine, pumped a cartridge into the chamber, and struck out.

There was a full moon still in the sky, although its light was obscured now and then by scudding clouds. But he could see clearly enough to make his way, and he knew, anyhow, that the dawn was not far off. No early-rising prospector had seen him leave camp.

He took a course up the valley as the Kid had done, according to Simmons. There was no telling how far the boy had gone, or where he had gone, of course, but he might have a camp fire going, and that could be seen at a distance. And yet he had gone on for less than half an hour when there came faintly to his ears the echoing chuck of a gunshot.

Startled, Frayne paused to listen. But the shot was not repeated. Nor could he tell definitely from which direction the sound had come, for the rock faces on each side had strange acoustic properties. He concluded that it might have been fired up a gulch which opened into the main valley from the right. In any event, he went that way, more cautiously now, and his senses sharply attuned.

On either side, and ahead, loomed the jagged summits, still covered with snow, the melting of which fed the creeks and filled the hastily built sluice boxes in which the prospectors washed gold-bearing gravel. A cold wind blew in Frayne's face.

Worriedly, he went on, still puzzling over that single shot. Had there been two shots, or three in quick succession, but evenly spaced, he would have read the signal for dire trouble. The single shot, however, could mean one of many things—a greenhorn's call for help, a clash with a grizzly, the accidental discharge of the nickel-plated .32-caliber revolver which the Kid carried, or one of a hundred other possibilities.

SOON he paused, for he was convinced that if the shot had come from this canyon, then he must be near the place where it had been fired. The moon was behind a cloud, too, and the way had grown dark, although the pearly light of the false dawn was glistening on the higher peaks. Moreover, he had the feeling that he was not alone—that some presence was near him. The Kid, perhaps.

He was on the point of calling out when the moon broke clear, and left him outlined there against the rocks. As that happened, the ghostly silence was shattered by a gunshot, and a bullet whined dismally past his head.

He dropped instantly for cover, his carbine ready. But as he did so, another bullet glanced from the rock behind which he lay. Angered, yet puzzled, he held his fire, although he marked by the flash of the gun where the other marksman was hidden.

"Hi, Kid!" he yelled. "It's Jim Frayne!"

But there was no reply.

He waited on for several minutes, unwilling to move, for the other had evidently located him. Moreover, the moon was hidden again. Frayne drew closer to the rock, as he seemed to hear somebody moving near him.

He waited, tensely, and then he heard the breathing of the other. A moment later, he descried the shadowy form of the mysterious one close beside the rock.

Frayne's anger rose. Somebody, evidently this person, had tried to kill him. Suddenly, he flung himself forward, grappling with the other, just as the latter was rising. The two went down with a crash, rolling over and over.

"Try to kill me, will you?" grated Frayne. "You sneaking——"

But his antagonist was no match for Frayne, being of slighter build. In a trice the big prospector had the other gripped helplessly, peering down into the captive's face.

"Kid!" he breathed in awe. Then, as words came to him with a rush: "What's the idea of trying to bushwhack me?"

"Lemme go!" raged the other, writhing in his grasp. "Lemme go! You've spoiled it all!"

From somewhere close by came the thudding of boots among the rocks, the sounds of a man running.

"Get him!" cried the Kid. "He's the one who shot at you! I didn't dare answer you for fear of letting him know where I was hidden. Get him, I tell you!"

But the thudding footfalls were diminishing in the distance.

"He's got away!" wailed the Kid. "And you, mixing in, let him do it! You've gummed the whole job!"

Frayne got up indignantly.

"What's all this?" he demanded brusquely. "Who got away, and why? Who is it that shot at me?"

"Ferris," was the reply. "One of Laidlaw's crowd. I had him cornered here. He thought you were coming to help me, so he took a couple of cracks at you. Now, he's gone, and he'll get to camp with the yarn of how I 'jumped' his claim! It's your fault, you big palooka!"

The light of the coming day had strengthened suddenly, so that Frayne could see the other's face. The big man scowled.

"You done what?" he asked. "You jumped Ferris's claim?"

The Kid shrugged impatiently.

"Sure," he replied readily. "I was holding him here until daylight, figuring that maybe you'd be along. Then the two of us could prove that he had no right to the ground. Anyway, he just beat me to staking the claim. It's taken me a week to locate it.

"I was out of amumnition for the gun"—he produced the nickel-plated revolver—"but Ferris didn't know it. He wouldn't take a chance on showing himself, until he saw you grab me. Now, he's gone to spread the story!"

Frayne's jaw sagged a little, while disbelief showed in his face. Then, as swiftly, disapproval. He had the true sourdough's abhorrence of claim jumpers.

"Let me get this straight," he said after a moment. "You jumped the claim Ferris staked—and I don't care if he is one of Laidlaw's men, or the most miserable Injun that ever roamed these hills. And you figured that I'd back your play. Is that it?"

THE level flatness of the man's tone made the youngster draw back a little. The Kid's lips opened as though to reply, but closed stubbornly the next instant. His greenish eyes seemed to harden. Again there came in his face that old look of scorn which he showed to one who distrusted him.

"Why not?" he demanded. "Ferris is working with Laidlaw, and Laidlaw robbed me of a year's savings. Why shouldn't I jump a claim that belonged to that crowd?"

Frayne sighed, and shook his head.

"Reckon you don't understand, Kid," he explained patiently. "A claim jumper is something worse than a cache thief——"

But the Kid broke in harshly: "Can't forget the time you found me after I'd robbed your cache, eh?"

Frayne, however, paid no attention.

"You may not understand these things because you're a chechahco," went on the big man. "A claim jumper isn't fit to associate with decent men. I don't aim to have it tagged onto any pardner of mine!"

The Kid stiffened, and he smiled thinly, disdainfully, his lips drawn back like those of a snarling wolf.

"So you're through with me, eh?" he asked bravely, yet unable to keep a tremor from his voice. "Don't want any claim jumper for pardner?"

"You heard me!" replied Frayne steadily. "And that's why I'm going to get this thing straightened out. This is my country up here, and I reckon it could be yours, too; but there's no room in it for a claim jumper. Nobody ever could make the play that I'm a claim jumper, and I don't aim to have it said about my pardner!"

"No!" retorted the Kid bitterly. "You don't jump claims—you stake 'em, and they're worthless!"

Frayne flushed, and his jaw tightened. And it seemed that if Fate must have smiled, then, at the futility of these human beings ever coming to an understanding of each other. It was steel striking steel, and the sparks flashed.

"So, we'll settle this in Northern fashion," went on Frayne. "I aim to take you before a miners' meeting, Kid!"

The boy flinched a little.

"Miners' meeting?" he echoed. "What that—lynch law?" There was uneasiness in his manner.

"Sometimes," replied Frayne grimly. "But, it's justice, every time!"

The Kid's breath exhaled slowly. In the weak light his face seemed to have whitened. But his eyes were steady, and now contempt crept into them.

"And you'd turn a pardner over to a miners' meeting?" he jeered. "A swell guy you are!" But his voice choked on the last word.

"Well, let's go!" he said suddenly, with a nervous laugh. "We'll find out what kind of a square deal I'll get! Nothing matters much, now, in any event. But it's been worth something to find out the kind of a man I'd picked for a pardner!"

THERE was no rattle of shovels in the sluice boxes, no cheerful sounds of activity along the creeks. Malemute was in solemn conference with itself. Ferris, shifty-eyed and scarcely enjoying the situation of having to admit that he had been "jumped" by a mere youngster armed with a nickel-plated revolver, nevertheless was determined to go through with it.

"It was getting dark," he explained, "when I found the ground I had been looking for. This kid tried to run me off the place. I didn't want to shoot him, and I didn't know but what he might have had somebody backing him up." He paused, and his eyes rested for a moment on big Jim Frayne, who stood in the forefront of the miners grouped there.

"So, you took a couple of shots at me when——" began Frayne, but Simmons, who was acting as chairman of the meeting, cut in:

"Easy, there, Jim! Let Ferris have his say. This is a miners' meeting, you know, jest as legal as any court. What we do here to-day, by gravy, will be accepted by any judge in Alaska! But she's got to be fair and square from the start!"

The Siwash Kid, standing there erect and white-faced, shot a curious glance at his pardner. There might have been gratitude in it, or merely scorn. But, Ferris concluded:

"That's all, gents. I staked the claim, and it's mine. And I'm warning yuh

that I aim to make it stick, because the boat will be here this morning from downriver, and the judge and district attorney are on board, figuring to give Malemute a taste of law and order. I'll carry my case there, if necessary!"

Simmons's whiskers bristled.

"Law and order, hey?" he demanded. "You ought to enjoy that sort of thing, Ferris—you and Bart Laidlaw. Still, you're here demanding justice, and you're going to get it. What's more, this case is going to be settled before the judge and prosecutor get here. What we decide on, is going to stick. What you got to say, Kid?" he asked.

The Kid smiled. He shot a baleful glance at Jim Frayne. Then, from his shirt he fished out a carefully folded piece of paper, which he handed to Simmons.

"Bart Laidlaw once sold me a claim for three hundred dollars, all the money I had," he explained. "That's the deed to it. It's the same claim that Ferris staked—took me a week to find it. Located right here in Malemute, on the site of the old stampede. So, in driving off Ferris, I merely jumped my own claim!"

Silence, then, while they crowded around Simmons, who had unfolded the paper. And then this silence was doubly shattered. First, by a delighted roar from the prospectors as they approached the Siwash Kid, to shake his hand, and second by a mellow-toned *oom-oom* from downriver. The boat from the Yukon, bringing more stampeders, and likewise bringing law and order, was here!

With the dispute settled, the prospectors made a rush for the river bank, where the boat was nosing in. Yet, three figures lingered—the Kid, Jim Frayne, and, unnoticed at the moment, Ferris, who felt instinctively that he had become less popular than ever, and therefore loath to mix with the crowd.

"Well," remarked the Kid bitterly, as he eyed Jim Frayne, "you didn't put it over after all, did you? I could have told you at the start that it was my claim, but you were too quick to bawl me out. So, I let it ride that way!"

Suddenly, big Jim Frayne caught him by the shoulders.

"Son," he said quietly, "you fooled me, but I did it to save you. I knew you'd get justice from a miners' meeting. Now, you're clean, and the verdict of these old sourdoughs will stand up any place in Alaska!" He smiled. "You understand now?" he asked.

ABRUPTLY, the boy grinned. Softness came into his eyes. He would have died before he would have admitted that he loved this big partner of his, and yet the story was plain in his face at that moment.

"Here," he said confusedly, as he fished out a couple of pieces of whitish rock from his pockets. "I restaked the claim for both of us, Jim, and I found these. Gold, isn't it, Jim? I know the other boys are washing nuggets out of the creek, but this looks as though it had come from a ledge!"

Wonderingly, Jim Frayne stared at the specimens. Once he tried to speak, but words did not seem to come readily to his tongue. Then he was aware that the eager face of Ferris was peering over his shoulder. Frayne's fingers closed over the samples, but it was too late.

Ferris snickered. "Mica!" he cried. "Fool's gold!"

But the next instant he flung up his hands, as Jim Frayne moved upon him. There was a queer expression in the big prospector's face.

"Ferris," he said quietly, in an odd voice, "you don't know much about ore samples, do you? For instance, these"—he held up the two fragments—"You said they're fool's gold, didn't you? But you can see now that you made a mistake, didn't you?"

Tonelessly, his words fell upon the

ears of Ferris. The latter licked his lips nervously. He was frightened, that was plain, for Frayne was looming over him menacingly. Ferris shot a quick glance at the Siwash Kid, who stood watching in awe and bewilderment.

"Sure, sure!" agreed Ferris heartily, as he found voice. "That's real gold, all right. I—I was mistaken!"

Frayne smiled, and nodded. "Just so," he remarked pleasantly. "You made a whale of a mistake, Ferris. And now, I'll tell you something. The Kid and me are pardners, so I'm speaking for him. We know you like that claim, because I reckon Laidlaw sent you up here to grab him off some ground. So, the Kid is going to sell this claim to you. Plumb cheap, too.

"The price is three hundred dollars—just what the Kid paid Laidlaw for it! It's a right nice claim. You'll probably find a lot more samples like these lying around. You can get your money back from Laidlaw, I reckon. Anyway, I'll leave that up to you. The Kid needs the money more than he needs the claim, because we're pulling out of here tomorrow.

"It's a deal, isn't it, Ferris? Just what the Kid paid for the claim—and Laidlaw gets his ground back once more!" His voice was velvet-smooth, wheedling, and yet his eyes were brittle-hard.

Ferris did not notice the softness of the words, but he did notice Jim Frayne's eyes. Ferris swallowed, and forced a sickly grin.

"Sure," he replied weakly. "It's a deal!" And he reached for the pocket where he carried his money.

ALFALFA SEED FOR ALASKA

THE Alaskan Agricultural College at Fairbanks, Alaska, which is ninety miles from the arctic circle, has ordered from the State seed registration service at the Colorado Agricultural College, Colorado-grown registered Grimm alfalfa seed.

This particular variety of alfalfa has become famous for its hardiness, quality, and productivity. Grown at a high altitude on nonirrigated land where the winters are severe, it is believed that it will be hardy enough to endure Alaskan winters. Heretofore it has been impossible to obtain a strain of alfalfa that would last over two years in Alaska.

THINKING THIEVES

THIEVES who operate near Canton, Texas, use their heads, for it is reported that they recently visited the pig pen of a farmer and knifed one of the finest hogs—and later took it away dressed for the market.

The farmer, hearing a noise in the direction of the pen, rushed out and found the hog breathing its last with a knife thrust through its body. Not to be outdone, he decided to butcher the kill, and thereupon heated water, scraped and dressed it and left it hanging up to cool and returned to the house for a few more winks of sleep.

The thieves, however, were wise and patient, for they stayed in one of the near-by sheds and smoked cigarettes until the farmer had completed his job and retired, and then they came from their hiding place, loaded the hog into their car, and drove off with it.

PRAIRIE'S END

By ROBERT J. HORTON

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters.

IN a saloon at Pondera, John Campbell meets Pearlman, whom he formerly knew. Pays Pearlman to keep quiet. Two young strangers, Odell and Olsen, get into an altercation with Pearlman. Campbell interferes. The young men leave, meet a stranger on the trail, take a note to Campbell's daughter, Hope. Pearlman follows, and they hear Campbell order him away. Later, in town, Pearlman picks a fight with the two young men, and Odell shoots him.

(BACK NUMBERS ARE EASILY PROCURED.)

CHAPTER X.

TWO MISSIONS.

AS soon as the two were out of the place, Odell whisked his partner, Slim, into the shadows of a space between two buldings, and spoke hurriedly and authoritatively.

He took Olsen by his coat lapels to emphasize his words. "Listen, Slim, you're goin' through with me, aren't you?" he asked in a voice deeply earnest. "You'll go through, won't you?"

"I don't see how I could get out of it," Slim replied in a cool drawl. "You know I'd go through with you, don't you?"

"Yes, Slim, I do. You're my friend, and maybe the only one I've got. Now, there's more to this maybe than we thought, and when Campbell finds out

what has happened, he'll come across. You know exactly why I shot that tinhorn, but keep that to yourself under all circumstances.

"I nagged him on, but I guess I did it in a way that none of 'em would detect. I was in the right, and every man in the place knew it. And he egged me on with his foul talk, and drew first. The draws were pretty fast, but I believe Mike, at least, saw him go for his gun a fraction of a second before I jerked at mine. Didn't you see it, Slim?"

"I was watchin' for it, and naturally I saw it," said Slim in a gloomy voice. "You're gettin' too fast, Rick."

"I had to be in this case," said Odell sharply. "Now you go straight to the sheriff and explain to him just how this came about. Put in all the details, drag it out, stall him just as long as you can, but always tell the truth."

"Then he'll throw me in jail and say if I've given it to him straight, I'll tell him where you are," remarked Slim, with delicate sarcasm.

"Tell him you don't know," ordered Odell stoutly. "And you won't know for that matter, guess as much as you please. Tell him you and him should go over to that dump and ask Mike and some of the others about it. Tell him you merely brought the news to be ahead of the town tattletales, if necessary. Tell him I said I would be over to see him later.

"Tell him I'm keeping low in case any of Pearlman's crowd should be lookin' for him—tell him anything. You know just how to work this thing, and I happen to know you do. And be mighty quick about it, too, for there's probably been somebody got to him before now."

"All right, Rick," said Slim. "I'll stall him to the last split second. But I reckon I know where you're goin', and I 'spect he'll get the same notion in his head. So long."

They parted, with Slim Olsen hurrying to the sheriff's office, and Ricky Odell disappearing in the shadows behind the building.

SLIM lost no time in getting to the jail, and arrived just as Tom Lane was about to leave his office, two others, who evidently had sped to the official with news of the shooting, being present.

The sheriff looked surprised and then pleased.

"Why, come right in—er—come right in. I thought you fellows had bolted town right after the—accident."

"We didn't," said Olsen, giving the two other men a sharp glance. "These men have to be here?" he asked.

"Sure not," said Lane agreeably. "We were just talkin' over some business and——"

"Well, I'm here to explain that business, and maybe I can give you more information than they can," said Slim coldly.

The two men had started for the door.

"So long, boys," said Lane. Then to Slim: "You always jump at conclusions?"

"Don't have to in this case," was Slim's calm retort. "What did you hear, sheriff?"

"I heard your pal, Ricky Odell, put that man Pearlman, he quarreled with the other night, in a pretty bad way, in one of the fastest gun plays ever staged in the range," said the sheriff slowly.

"In a bad way!" exclaimed Slim. "Isn't the man dead?"

"He might be by now," Lane confessed. "You fellows wanted him dead, didn't you?"

Slim stared for a few moments with his mouth open. "Why, when Rick is goaded into drawin' down on a man, after that man has already made a healthy start for his cannon, Rick usually draws fast and accurate, and shoots the same way."

"Oh, so he's a gun fighter, eh?" droned the sheriff. "Draws fast and shoots accurately. They've got to be that way if they're to make any progress at their trade."

Slim sat down, with a look of exasperation on his tanned face.

"Sheriff, let's go square, because we're goin' square with you. I'm in on this play as much as Rick, for I backed him up and was tickled all over to do it. I'm Rick's friend, and when I tell you that, I've spoke a mouthful. Ricky is fast with his gun, but he's not a gun fighter, and never picked a fight with a man in his life. I've known him since we were kids, and this is his first killin'.

"He's all broken up over it. Tremblin', and sweatin', and swearin', and I had to get him out of the way. Was afraid there might be some of that Pearlman's gang around to take the thing up, and Rick couldn't hit the side of a barn in the shape he's in. He's shakin' like a leaf, and I doubt if he could pull a gun, let alone shoot it right now. I told him to get out of sight, go anywhere, and he told me to tell you he'd see you later. He dodged in the dark, and I don't know where he went. I'm here to represent."

SHERIFF LANE had listened intently, and had repeatedly searched the speaker's face. It was his business to know considerable about men. Here was a young man he thoroughly believed to be telling the exact truth. But the connection with Campbell, which he suspected—that was quite a different matter.

"Well—they call you Slim, do they not?"

"Olsen is the last name," scowled Slim suspiciously.

"Very well, Olsen it is," said the sheriff genially. "I understand very well, from what I've heard from reliable sources, that Pearlman picked a quarrel with Rick, as you call him, and Campbell stepped in to prevent a possible shooting affray. Isn't that so?"

"Yes," snapped Olsen, "and we were mighty glad of it. We came here, minding our own business, to see the country. We'd never been so close to any real mountains."

"That's all right." Lane nodded. "And you told me this night you'd gone up to the foothills and had happened on Campbell's place up there, and had had dinner with him. Isn't that so?"

"That's the unvarnished truth, sheriff." Olsen nodded.

"Now, when you came back to-night, this Pearlman picked on you again and said some things that practically compelled Odell to match guns with him. So?"

"Every word of it, and there are plenty who will say that Pearlman actually went for his gun first," replied Slim stoutly.

"In the meanwhile," said the sheriff shrewdly, leaning on his desk and looking his visitor in the eyes, "didn't Pearlman go up there to see Campbell? I expect an answer straight from the shoulder, since you say you're comin' square."

Slim's gaze was steel blue. "I cannot answer that question!"

"Why not?" Lane shot crisply.

"Because Campbell stepped into that first fracas, because you found out from us to-night—we told you willin' enough—that we'd had supper with Campbell after stumbling upon his place up there, and because there seems to be something queer about the whole business, and you seem to be linkin' up with this Pearlman and Campbell in some way—and you're not goin' to do it!"

"How do you know I'm not goin' to do it?" asked Lane angrily.

"Because we came here on our own, not knowin' a soul in town," rang Slim's voice, "and all you've got to do to find it out for yourself is ask a few questions around. Because this Pearlman picked on us from the moment we breezed up

to the bar, and Ricky started to have some fun at his own expense with everybody but this tinhorn willing. Because Campbell, who we didn't know at all, butted in on the play. Because we visited Campbell by accident, and because this Pearlman tried to get Rick to-night for no reason we know of. You can't link us up with anybody or anything. I'm goin' to answer no tricky questions, Mr. Sheriff. Ricky Odell and me are on our own!"

The sheriff relighted his cigar, puffed on it, turning his eyes from the youth, and then spoke pleasantly:

"I have to look at all angles in a case like this. We don't have many shootings around here, an' we don't like 'em. I've got to ask certain questions, and you, not livin' here, wouldn't know why. I'll have to repeat, Olsen, that you said you both were goin' to play square."

"We still stand that way, sheriff, but we're not goin' to answer any questions about anything we don't know about. We will answer questions that have to do with us directly."

"You mean, of course, that Pearlman didn't go to Campbell's."

"We were not in a position to see Pearlman if he did come!"

"Why not?" queried Lane, with a look of sudden interest.

"It was nearly dark when we got there, and we talked to the girl out by the hitching rail." Slim paused, knitting his brows, for he had to be careful, and knew he was on dangerous ground.

"Never mind the girl, for she'd keep any young fellow hangin' around," said Lane amicably. "I think Pearlman said something about a girl in the ruckus to-night. Leave her out and go on."

SLIM had had a needed respite for quick thinking while the sheriff had been talking, and now he went on confidently. "Her father saw us out there, and came stampin' on the scene. He recognized us, told us there were no towns in the hills, and that we didn't have grub enough to go over the mountains, and invited us to have supper before we started. We agreed and went around back to put up our horses, and wash up for supper. We were hungry, and there wasn't a bit of sense in turning down the invitation."

"Of course not!" exclaimed Lane with a friendly smile. "Now tell the truth, Slim, for I know there was a rider followed you two up there. It may be I know more than you think, so don't get yourself and your friend in a tangle."

Slim nodded grimly. "There was a rider," he said slowly, "but it was about dark, and we were in back, and couldn't see him. We're not goin' to try and identify any rider we couldn't see. He stopped out front a short while, rode away, and Campbell came back, and we went in to supper. That's our story, and if you know any different, make the most of it. But you can't hang anything on us out of that business."

"Why, boy, I'm not tryin' to hang anything on you," said Lane impatiently. "I merely wanted to be sure if it was Pearlman that went up there and thought maybe you could help me out."

"I'm afraid we can't do anything in that direction," was Slim's response.

Lane remained silent for some little time, which suited Slim. Slim realized that he wasn't exactly stalling the sheriff. He was battling his wits against those of the official, and he was taking care to protect Ricky Odell and himself—although he had Odell foremost in his mind.

On Lane's side there was more than a bit of shrewd admiration for his youthful adversary. He, too, knew they were engaged in a battle of wits. That Slim Olsen was clever—more than ordinarily clever—was evinced in the way he had handled the matter of Pearlman's ride to the Campbell ranch.

Slim had acknowledged in time—and at the time he thought was proper—that there had been a rider at the Campbell place, but that in no way could he or Odell know that it was Pearlman. And he had effectively stopped Lane's advance in that direction. Indeed, he was no dumb wandering cow-puncher, this boy!

Lane now advanced from another quarter.

"Slim, I've thought of something else," he said, with a slight wrinkle of his brow, puffing thoughtfully at his cigar., "Maybe you boys don't know that Pearlman was up there, an' maybe I don't. We'll let it go at that. But, if it was Pearlman who rode up there, and if he followed you there, or if he thought you had ridden up to see the man who had stopped that first gun play, and were keeping out of sight, wouldn't he feel mighty sore at you boys?"

"He might—on general principles," Slim conceded.

"There you are!" exclaimed the sheriff in triumph. "He suspected you had been there; he had gotten no satisfaction out of Campbell concerning anything he had in mind, and when you two drifted back to town and into the Board of Trade, it just naturally made him so mad he picked a fight without thinking of anything 'cept gettin' even with somebody!"

SLIM scowled and looked steadily at Lane. This was no dumb sheriff! And the question he had just asked was a poser. It was a dead out for Ricky and himself. He decided to take advantage of this and find out what the joker in the question was.

"That's probably the way of it," he said, nodding. "He let his imagination run away with him, or he found out we had gone up there. It made him sore to think we may have taken up with our protector of the night before, and he picked a fight with us and forced Ricky into a gun play at sight." He was watching Lane closely.

"Of course!" Lane beamed. "Then Pearlman must have known you went up there, see? And he had to ride up there to make sure. He just rode into town a bit before you fellows came in. Don't you suppose that he must have been the mysterious rider you spoke about?"

Slim smiled broadly. "Sheriff," he said quizzically, "you're good. There ain't no doubt about it—you're good! Now let's try another angle, and maybe we can get somewhere. What connection is there, or was there, between Campbell and this Pearlman? Explain the whole tangle to me, and maybe what Rick and me has seen might shed some light on what you're tryin' to get at." He leaned back in his chair with a look of satisfaction.

But Lane frowned. His fresh attack had proved to be a boomerang, and he had no intention of explaining Campbell's connection with Pearlman, because he was becoming more and more convinced that there was a more serious connection between the wise youths and Campbell. He was almost on the point of believing that Campbell had sent them to town to kill Pearlman. But why should he do this when he had the chance to do the job himself when he had stepped into the first play in the Board of Trade?

Lane's head felt as if it were tired of thinking. One thing was sure—he would get nothing out of Slim Olsen. At present the youth was a match for him. Later, it might be different.

"I can't tell you anything without tellin' you too much." He scowled. "If you don't know about anything, then it's for your own good. I guess we'll call it off, for the present."

"I suppose you'll want to hold me," said Slim, rising.

"Hold you?" Sheriff Lane appeared surprised. "What do I want to hold

you for? Everybody knows that Pearlman deliberately forced a gun play and got the worst of it. I'm not holding you. You're free to go as you please, and do as you please. I think I'll take some air myself a little later. Go ahead." He waved a hand toward the door.

It was a master stroke, and Slim Olsen went out with his brow furrowed in thought. What did Lane have up his sleeve?

Slim walked through the cool, crisp air of early morning to the livery.

"My pardner's horse here?" he asked casually.

"Sure," answered the barn man. Then, seeing the look of perplexity on Olsen's face, he said: "He hired a fresh horse and rode out of here 'bout an hour or so ago."

"Thanks," grunted Slim, and, tossing the barn man a dollar, he went out, proceeded to the hotel, and went to bed.

CHAPTER XI.

ANOTHER ANGLE.

IT was glorious dawn when Ricky Odell drew rein near the Campbell place in the foothills. He paused to look back over the golden waves of plain, sweeping into the sunrise. The little creek, flowing down from the higher ranges, sparkled, and the river laughed, and the air was sweet with the morning songs of the birds. Ricky removed his hat and waved it across his horse's head, as if in salute to this radiant universe.

He turned his horse and caught sight of a rider coming down the trail. Instinctively, he struck for his gun butt. Then he raised his hand in another salute, which ended in a bow and the sweep of his hat, as the rider drew up beside him.

"Are you a sun worshiper?" asked Hope Campbell, radiantly beautiful with her hair golden in the sunlight, and her lips breaking into a saucy smile. "I saw you wave your hat at it."

"Miss Campbell, this is not the time for trivial nonsense," he said soberly. "I saluted the dawn, the sun, the beauty of the plain, the singin' of the happy birds, and thanked God for another day." He bowed again.

There was a queer light in the girl's dancing eyes which faded gradually.

"I almost believe you are in earnest, Ricky Odell," she said seriously.

"I am in earnest, dear girl," he said severely, and with an air of injured dignity which, sincere or otherwise, was splendidly done. "I am a lover of beauty—beauty of nature, beauty of horseflesh, beauty in a woman; I'm even appreciative of a beautifully played hand at cards!" He arched his brows in a simulation of superiority.

In the face of all this, Hope Campbell laughed delightedly.

"Ricky Odell, you're a fraud," she taunted, and her voice was good to hear.

"It's a good thing you're not a man," he said with a ferocious scowl. "Besides that, you should be a little more considerate and have more courtesy. I hadn't finished what I wanted to say, or had intended to say."

"Oh, I'm sorry," she said in a voice of repentance. "Please excuse my interruption, Mr. Odell. Honestly, I thought you were just joking, but now I see I took too much for granted. You are in earnest, and when an Irishman is in earnest, well—that means something."

"I wish you wouldn't keep on with that Irish stuff," he said irritably. "Don't you like Irishmen?"

"I have nothing against Irishmen," she answered flippantly.

"That isn't answering my question," he said, "but here's one you're goin' to like, so you better take a good look at him while the light's good."

"Oh, indeed! Now that's interesting.

I've been looking at you, too, now that I think of it. I'll grant you this, Ricky, dear—you're a novelty because there's nothing dull about you."

"Very well, I accept your apology. Now, Hope, sweet, we'll get back to what I was sayin' about beauty. We'll take it by sections and pass over the beauties of nature, because we're both very familiar with them. We'll pass over the birds, too. My favorite is roast grouse, and I 'spect you wouldn't turn up your nose at one, either. But take the beauties of horseflesh. That is a fine animal which is honored by having you on its back." He looked appreciatively at the fine points of the black charger, Bismarck.

"You're well mounted yourself, Mr. Odell," she commented.

"Any horse that carries me, Miss Hope, is proud to eat my oats," he said sternly.

"IT'S a very good horse," said Hope gravely. "But when Bismarck is in shape, I can outrun you. This is the first time I've ridden him since his sprain. Vagle says I must be easy with him for a week or more."

"Yeah? And who's Vagle? Never mind. I know. He's that old-timer you've got workin' for you up there. Looks queer to me. But that horse——" Odell was looking the animal over critically. "Yes, ma'am, Miss Hope, if that horse can live up to its points, it can beat mine—and I'll bet yours is the only horse hereabouts that can do it."

"Why, Ricky——" She stopped short in confusion. The name had come out so naturally.

"That's all right, Hope," he announced cheerfully. "That's what it's goin' to be from now on. We're friends, are we not? And don't friends call each other by their first names?"

"I suppose so," said the girl doubtfully.

"Of course they do!" sang Ricky Odell. "And you know when they've been friends a while—a boy an' a girl, I mean—bimeby they—well, no matter." He shrugged and smiled. The smile went with the sunrise, and she returned it.

"Now," he continued, "you were about to thank me or something for sayin' that I believed your horse Bismarck could outrun mine, isn't that so?"

"I was going to say it was very kind of you to say that," she confessed. "But I'm not sure at all—Ricky."

"Listen, girlie, I paid your horse a bigger compliment than you think." He nodded impressively. "This horse I'm on isn't my own horse a-tall. I rode my own horse pretty hard yesterday and last night, and I hired this horse to ride up here this morning."

He threw a look over his shoulder down the back trail, and she noted it and realized that it had seemed perfectly natural to meet him like this in the early morning, whereas he must have come on some mission. She wondered.

"Now my own horse, which is in the livery down in Pondera, is a mighty fine animal—fast and enduring—and when I say I think maybe Bismarck could beat him, I am saying something. So! You see?"

"Yes, that is a compliment, Ricky. And I'm beginning to wonder why you hired a horse and rode up here so early in the morning."

"Oh, that?" He waved the matter aside with a gesture of his hand. "I'll tell you later. I want to go through with this beauty business, now that we've settled the horseflesh matter. You will remember I said I was a lover of beauty in a woman?"

"You seem to find beauty in everything," she replied, her cheeks blooming with rose.

"Well, I don't," he said shortly. "I see no beauty in—in a lot of things. There's no sense mentioning them. But I do see beauty in a woman, and in a

girl; and—with the sun spinnin' gold in your hair, and your laughing, tantalizin' eyes, and your saucy lips, and the grace of you in the saddle, Hope—you're the most beautiful creature I ever laid eyes on! And if you even think I'm foolin', I'll drag you down off that horse and kiss you!"

Hope listened, her eyes wide, her lips parted. She lowered her gaze, then raised it with her eyes flashing.

"I don't think you should have said that, and spoiled it all," she said with genuine regret in her tone.

"Why not?" he asked in surprise. "It is true, every word of it, and it comes straight from my Irish heart. I've fussed around with girls, Hope, and flattered 'em to see 'em smile. Any fellow will do that, if he has red blood in his veins. But I am not flatterin' you, girl, and you didn't smile. It won't spoil anything because I come out frankly at the start. You have too much sense for that."

SHE was looking into the distance, across the flowing gold of plain to the clear blue horizon in the south. She felt a desire to be alone, to whirl her horse and speed away. But she didn't. She looked at the frank, serious face of Ricky Odell, and believed him. It was not hard to look at Ricky. He had dropped his hat. She felt a sudden urge to swerve her horse and pick it up for him, but his next words stopped her.

"When do you get any sleep?" he was asking. "I find you in the evening, and I find you in the first of the morning."

"Why, I sleep at night, silly!" She had almost giggled.

"But you can't sleep at night?" he protested.

Her brows went up. "No? And why not?"

"Because the stars would sing to you, and the moon would have no control over 'em, and would shout to 'em to 'Shut up,' and that would wake you up. And then you would hear the mockin' birds, and other little night birds about your window, and the stars would start singin' twice as hard, and when they do that to-night, you'll think of me—an' that'll make it worse than ever!"

"Ricky Odell!" she exclaimed, her eyes laughing. "I might have known it! All Irishmen are born poets!"

"And born lovers, too," warned Ricky. "Can't you see a romance when it's budding right under your pretty nose?"

"Ricky, why did you come up here this morning?" she demanded, flustered, but stern, nevertheless.

"Well, tell the truth, I came up to see your father," he confessed a bit ruefully. "You see, I have to be truthful with you—I never could lie to you, Hope—but I wish I came up thinking I might by chance find you ridin' out like this. This has been the most enjoyable half hour of my life, honestly. Is anybody up but you—besides you, I mean? My grammar falls down terribly in these high altitudes."

"Never mind your grammar, Ricky. What do you wish to see father about?" There was a worried look clouding her pretty eyes.

"I can't tell you that, girlie. I'm merely a messenger."

"Is anything wrong?" she asked quickly.

"Not that I know of," he replied, shaking his head. He gripped the horn of his saddle quickly and dived down with his right, retrieving his hat. "I suppose he's up by now."

"Yes, I reckon so," said the girl slowly. She pressed her lips tightly, then went on: "Ricky, you said you would never tell me anything but the truth. Please tell me this: Is there any trouble or anything like that? Please tell me. There was a strange rider here last night, and I could tell by father's

voice that he was angry. Mother asked me not to go out on the porch. And mother and father were still talking downstairs in low tones when I went to sleep."

"Your father has been away for some time, hasn't he?" said Ricky gently. "It's only natural they would have many things to talk about. Why, I'm surprised if you're worryin' about anything. I met your father first down in Pondera. I met him accidentally up here the second time. We're somewhat like friends, already. Is it strange I should come up with a message for him? I can't tell you what it is about. It wouldn't be fair to my trust, would it?"

She looked into his clear eyes. And for the second time that morning she believed him fully. Her eyes roved happily over the vast panorama below them —the limitless plain, the blue rim of the horizon, the mounting sun, the silver ribbon of river trailing its robes of green. She looked back at Ricky Odell, strong, almost handsome, his hat set at a saucy angle on his head. Why, it seemed good to be there in the glory and freshness of the morning, with him at her side!

"Come on," she said gayly. "We'll go home, and I'll coax dad to make you stay for breakfast."

And away they went—to find John Campbell waiting for them at the hitching rail in front of the house.

CHAPTER XII.

CAMPBELL GETS THE NEWS.

AS they rode up to the rail and reined in their mounts, Hope called cheerfully to her father: "Look what I found on the uptrail. Don't forget to make him stay for breakfast, daddy. He's ridden clear from town."

"Hope, turn your horse over to Vagle and go into the house at once!" her father commanded.

There was a long silence, during which father and daughter looked steadily at each other. The girl's cheeks had paled, and Odell gritted his teeth.

"That isn't any way in which to speak to me, father," said Hope in a low, steady voice.

"Are you goin' to do as I say?" roared Campbell in a rage.

In a trice, Hope was off her horse. She walked straight up to him, her face almost white.

"I will obey you in anything which is reasonable, father," she said in a strong voice, holding her head high, "but not when you address me in such a tone. You seem to have forgotten, in the time I've been away, that I am your daughter."

"And in the time you've been away, you've been taught to disobey your father—is *that* it?" demanded Campbell angrily.

"I have been taught to conduct myself in such a manner that I will be treated with respect," was the girl's spirited rejoinder. "I have never treated you as anything but my father. I expect as much respect from you as from any other man."

Campbell sputtered and calmed down. A glint of admiration came into his eyes. This girl holding her head high before him was a Campbell, sure enough.

"All right, daughter, please go to the house," he said.

"Very well, father. I'll send Vagle for Bismarck. I'll tell mother you're staying to breakfast, Mr. Odell." She smiled at him, nodded coolly to her father, and walked rapidly toward the house.

"Is this any of your work?" Campbell demanded of Ricky.

"You're doin' your daughter an injustice when you ask that," said Ricky coldly. "Why, I've only met her two or three times, and each time by accident."

"Then take care that you don't meet

her again, by accident or any other way, understand?" said Campbell harshly.

Odell slid from his saddle, threw the reins over his horse's head, and confronted the irate man at the rail.

"It's funny," he drawled, "that a man can get up on such a morning as this, feelin' the way you do. I'm twenty-one, free, and white, and with nothing in my past I'm ashamed of. I'll meet your daughter every time I can, regardless of the circumstances."

Campbell's face darkened. It was some time before he could get words out of his mouth. "Why, you—you——"

"Cut it!" Odell interrupted curtly. "I have that right!" He looked Campbell squarely in the eyes, and his own eyes were hard. "Don't try it, Campbell," he warned, "for I'll beat you to the draw! That's one reason why you should keep away from your gun, and there's another reason far more important."

Campbell never knew how close he had been to the point of drawing. Odell's words stopped him.

"What other reason?" he shot through his teeth. The idea of this stripling opposing him!

"You don't think for a minute that I rode up here on a hired horse this morning for nothing, do you?" asked Odell calmly.

"I don't give a hang how you got here!" Campbell exploded. "What do you want?"

"I want to talk to you a minute or two, and then I expect to accept Miss Hope's kind invitation to stay to breakfast," replied Odell. "Maybe I've got pleasant news, and maybe it isn't so good. But I thought it important enough to bring it to you, and you'd better calm down at once and receive it coolly."

Despite his anger, Campbell was keenly interested.

"What's the news?" he asked with more composure.

ODELL'S eyes narrowed a trifle. "Early this morning," he said slowly, "I shot and killed your man Pearlman in the Board of Trade in Pondera."

"You what—killed him?" Campbell managed to gasp out.

"Exactly," confirmed Odell. "He picked a quarrel with me the minute Slim and me went into the place. I was careful—very careful—to let him put himself in the wrong. He bullied and insulted me, and mentioned your daughter. I slapped him in the face and let him start for his gun. Then I dropped him for keeps."

"But—but"—Campbell seemingly could not believe his ears—"but Pearlman was one of the wickedest gunmen I ever knew!" he blurted.

"He was wicked this morning," nodded Odell. "I believe he was shootin' off his mouth about you when we came in—not that anybody would believe him, of course. He was buyin' the drinks. You'll remember you'd given him till sundown to-night to leave town. I don't think he would have stayed. But he wanted revenge on somebody, and Slim and me figured he was takin' it out on us. It wouldn't have made any difference, for he'd have got it anyway—after the cracks he made. I thought you'd want to know what happened—from me."

Campbell was visibly shaken. His eyes no longer glowed with anger, and his face had gone pale under his tan. He kept wetting his lips with his tongue.

"Tell me just what he said before the —what happened?" he asked in a dull voice.

"I don't know what he had been sayin' before we got in there, as I told you. When we came in, Mike came hurryin' up, and we bid for a couple of beers. Neither me nor Slim drink to any extent. I saw Pearlman at once, through the mirror, with a crowd, drinkin' a ways down the bar. He saw us talkin'

amiable with Mike, who was tellin' us Pearlman was drinkin' and shootin' off his mouth, and he didn't like it a bit. Then Mike left us, and that was the first part of the business."

Odell paused to light a cigarette he had rolled while he had been talking. Campbell watched him with a deep frown. He knew Odell was telling the truth, and he wanted to hear it all.

"Go on," he growled.

"When Mike went back down the bar, Pearlman made some slighting remarks about us, very pointed remarks, I might say; remarks which drew the attention of the crowd to us and to him. Then he ordered a drink for the house, and we ignored his invitation. He came up to us and made a crack that I had been ready to buy drinks the night before, but fell down when it came to showin' off without an audience.

"I told him to lay off us, that we were not lookin' for any trouble, but were minding our own business. I put this across hard, two or three times, so the crowd would be sure it was not me who was pushin' the fight. Then he said we—Slim an' me—had been up here, and as much as declared we were helping you to double-cross him in some way—hinted we had a deal on."

CAMPBELL swore and looked toward the house. No one was in sight except the crablike man Vagle, who was coming for Hope's horse.

"Don't say anything while he's here," cautioned Campbell. "I'll talk stock talk till he's gone."

When the hand had taken away the horse, Odell resumed.

"I told him we didn't know what he was talkin' about, and to leave us alone. He as much as accused the two of us as bein' ready to take him on, and I sent Slim across the room, makin' it a two-man play—for I was gettin' mad fast." Odell paused and nodded slowly to the older man to warn him of what was coming.

"The next crack he made was that I was trailin' with you because I was sweet on your girl, and he called me a 'prairie rat.' I thought I'd taken enough, and I slapped his face. I let him make a move for his gun, and plugged him in the heart."

Campbell's lips were pressed into a thin, white line.

"You had to do it," he breathed, looking down the trail. "There wasn't any way out of it. Especially after—after ——" He shot a quick look at Odell.

"Exactly," Odell said grimly. "I couldn't let him go on and bring Hope's name into it. He was the kind to do it."

"I won't have to go down to town to-day after all," Campbell muttered vacantly. Then his eyes lighted up, and he stared at Odell.

"Listen, young fellow, you must be a wonder with your gun. I reckon you knew pretty well that you could beat Pearlman to it. You just said a while back that you could beat me to it. And you knew I had to go down to-day and settle with Pearlman if he didn't leave town. Isn't that so?"

"Yes, that's so," Odell acknowledged promptly.

"Well, are you sure you didn't pick the fight with Pearlman so that I wouldn't have to go down there to-day?" asked Campbell pointedly.

Odell's brows lifted. "I have told you the circumstances just as they happened," returned Odell, again growing cold.

"But you won't deny that if you did do this thing to take the trouble off my hands, even though I didn't ask you to do it, you would, in a way, have a club over my head. Isn't that so?"

Odell's lips curled. "It's a mighty cheap way of lookin' at it," he said. "Perhaps I've got you wrong, Mr. Campbell."

This had its effect. "No, no, I guess

I didn't realize what I was sayin'," he said hastily. "You had to do what you did. Still—you could have stayed out of there."

"I'll stay out of no place for any man," was Odell's hot retort. "There's no reason for any one to pick on me or on Slim, unless it's because of the fact that you butted in on our side that first night. Everything seems to have happened the wrong way after you made that move. What was your idea?"

Odell's words crackled on the air, and John Campbell stared at him with a startled light in his eyes. The youth spoke the truth! Why had he stepped in? Because at the time he thought he would make Pearlman draw and end it himself! Why, he couldn't answer Ricky Odell's question and tell the truth!

"It seems to me," Ricky drawled, "that the best way out of it would be to tell me what's behind all this, and then Slim and me will know how to protect ourselves. It's no more'n fair. I never killed a man in my life till now."

CAMPBELL fell back. He felt guilty, and he knew his face was red, and that his eyes must be giving away his thoughts.

"Where's your pardner—Slim?" he asked in confusion.

"I sent him to the sheriff to tell him exactly what took place," replied Odell. "I told him to tell nothin' but the truth, and to leave you and the rest of it out of it, and to stall the sheriff off until I could get word to you. I don't know what kind of a mess I'm mixed up in. What's more, if you don't tell me, I'll go to the sheriff himself and demand a show-down!"

"That won't be necessary," said Campbell quickly. "And I guess you've cleaned up what mess there was. Yes," he concluded grimly, "that's about what you've done." He turned. "Vagle!" he called. Then to Odell: "Come on, and Vagle will take care of your horse. You better stay to breakfast until I have had time to think."

When Vagle had taken the horse, Odell went up the steps to the porch, sat down, and proceeded to roll a cigarette. He had just lighted it when Hope Campbell came out. He threw it away, and took off his hat immediately, rising.

"You needn't have done that," said the girl. "I don't mind a man smoking in my presence, for I'm used to it."

"I don't think I better take so much liberty at first," he said gallantly, with a bow and a twinkle in his eyes. They had stepped to the porch railing.

"I don't feel I should be afraid of any liberties from you, Ricky," said Hope with a smile. "You're a gentlemanly sort."

"In my rough way, Miss Hope," he corrected. "I reckon I've got plenty of competition among the blue bloods hereabouts."

"You mean Ira Crowell," she accused. "Why didn't you tear up that note you brought from him?" she taunted.

"You're forgettin' I hadn't met you yet," he smiled. "And after I had met you, it was a good excuse for meeting you—an alibi. But I wouldn't swear I'd be a messenger from him again."

Hope laughed. "I get plenty of notes and know lots of boys, but I hope you won't think I'm a flirt," she chided.

"Not so far as I'm concerned, you're not a flirt, Hope."

She looked away quickly. "Don't you think this is a pretty place?" she asked, changing the subject with a feeling she was on dangerous ground. This Ricky Odell was not to be trifled with, and she was not accustomed to men like that. As for Ira Crowell—he was silly The others——

"This is a beautiful place," Ricky told her with an honest ring to his voice. "Look at the sun filtering through the

trees and droppin' golden spangles on the grass. And those high mountains wearin' purple shawls. It's my first time in the hills."

"I have a name for it," she said, somewhat dreamily. "I call it 'Prairie's End.' It is—that—in more ways than one."

"It's a pretty name," said Ricky. "But if it's that, it must be the beginning of something else."

"Come to breakfast!"

They turned and saw Mrs. Campbell in the doorway.

CHAPTER XIII.

AVOWALS.

IT was a sprightly breakfast, with John Campbell at the head of the table, his wife, Jane, at the foot, and Hope Campbell and Ricky Odell on either side. Hope and Ricky kept up a running fire of banter, into which Jane frequently interjected a sprightly remark. John Campbell was quiet, mostly, and moody. Time after time, Odell caught the older man regarding him curiously. Jane served the breakfast of baked apples, sausages and eggs, and griddle cakes, biscuits with wild honey, and fragrant hot coffee.

"This is the liveliest breakfast we've had in this house since we lost our boy," said Jane thoughtfully in an interval of silence.

John Campbell dropped his knife and fork and looked at her, almost crestfallen. Then he quickly resumed eating. There was an awkward pause, and Odell thus learned for the first time that there had been a boy in the family. He looked at Hope, who smiled.

"Bismarck is almost himself again," she told her father. "Mr. Odell paid me a compliment to-day by saying he believed Bismarck could beat his own horse."

Campbell looked suspiciously at the youth.

"I was riding a hired horse at the time," Odell explained lightly. "But I wouldn't be surprised if Bismarck could give my own a run for the money."

"Hope's horse is a thoroughbred," Campbell muttered.

"Some day, when Bismarck is himself, and you have your own horse, we'll have a race," said Hope merrily.

"That wouldn't be fair—with you ridin' him," said Odell.

"Why not? I ride well, don't I, daddy?"

"I mean, I would have to let you win." Odell laughed.

"Which shows he's a chivalrous young man, Hope," said her mother, while Campbell scowled sullenly.

"If that's the case, I'll get Vagle to ride him," returned the girl. "Vagle can probably ride as well as you, Mr. Odell." There was a mischievous look in her eyes when she glanced up at him.

"I lay no claim to bein' a marvel in anything," Odell said.

Thus it went, back and forth, with Jane frequently joining in, and John Campbell remaining taciturn and thoughtful, as if he were hardly conscious of the food he was eating. All had noticed that Ricky Odell's table manners were not those of the average cowhand. Jane and Hope appreciated this, while it increased Campbell's suspicions.

He could not get away from the fact that the youth who sat at his table had just killed one of the fastest gunmen he had ever known. He couldn't be expected to overlook that fact, either. And here Odell was, eating in a most mannerly way, carrying on a conversation which he made a little short of brilliant with his witty sallies and clever repartee.

Campbell always had been suspicious of men who could talk lightly and entertainingly. Yet Odell had faced him in an entirely different manner out by the hitching rail. He had talked

straight from the shoulder, without mincing words.

He had given him, Campbell, such a vivid description of what had taken place in town that Campbell could easily form a mental picture of the scene in the Board of Trade when Odell's gun had blazed death into Pearlman's heart. And it was the indirect reference to Hope which had precipitated the shooting. That fact made Campbell squirm; but he was not satisfied that Odell had not brought on the clash insidiously, and subtly led Pearlman to his doom.

Of course, later, there would be sure to be the sheriff. Campbell decided to go to town with Odell, and the decision cheered him somewhat.

CAMPBELL and Odell left the house together and sat on a rustic bench in the yard, where the trees drew back from the trail. Campbell filled his pipe, and Odell rolled and lighted the usual brown-paper cigarette.

"What do you suppose has happened to your friend Slim?" Campbell asked casually.

"I suppose the sheriff held him, and is waiting for me to come in," was the answer. "I sent word by him to the sheriff that I would report, which I intend to do this morning."

"Hm-m-m," grunted Campbell. "I'll have to go in with you."

"I don't see any necessity for it," said Odell earnestly.

"Well, you don't know Tom Lane, that's all. He's the sheriff. He'll want to see me. He probably knows you fellows were up here yesterday, and he more'n likely knows that Pearlman followed you up. He'll want to know why the crowd was here. I'll tell you this much, Odell, and be careful not to talk to anybody about it. I'd known this Pearlman before, and he thought he had something on me.

"He was tryin' to make me for a bunch of money to keep his foul mouth shut, but he went too far when he came up here. That's why I gave him his notice. You did the job I'd have had to do if he failed to leave. Now you know all I'm goin' to tell you. Pearlman is gone, and you haven't anything to worry about." He was thinking of Brackett, the only man he really feared, but he had no intention of mentioning the name.

"I'm glad I was of some help," murmured Odell.

"Hello! There's another visitor comin'," said Campbell. "I can hear him on the trail. Hustle out of sight behind the house till I find out who this rider is. Hurry!"

Odell sped away, but he walked slowly back when he saw the newcomer was Slim Olsen, who dismounted near Campbell.

"Let me do the questioning," he suggested to Campbell as he joined them. "I reckon Slim can talk easier to me. What happened, Slim?"

"Nothing," drawled Olsen. "He told me he had nothin' against me, and I was free to go and do as I please. I found out you'd hired a horse at the livery, and suspected you'd come up here. I came along to pass you the news that he expects to see you, but says we were in the right."

"Pshaw," growled Campbell. "I'm the man he wants to see."

"He didn't say any such thing to me," Slim announced.

"Didn't he ask you if you had been up to my place?" asked Campbell. "Didn't he mention me in any way a-tall?"

"Well, yes," Slim confessed. "But he didn't say he wanted to see you. He asked me if we hadn't been up this way yesterday, and I told him we had stumbled on your place. Didn't see any use in concealin' it. The thing he tried to get me to confess was that Pearlman had been up here. He tried every way

he could to trip me into sayin' Pearlman had been up here. Seemed to be more interested in that than anything else. I steered a roundabout course and didn't tell him anything he wanted to know."

"Well, I'll have to tell him," said Campbell wryly. "And that will finish this business. Odell can tell you what I told him a minute or two ago, so you'll understand why Pearlman was here, and why you boys haven't got anything to worry about. But you better get some breakfast, and when you're through, we'll hit for town." He rose to his feet, looking suddenly old to both youths.

Vagle came running from the trees on the opposite side, and whispered excitedly to his master. Campbell waved his away.

"Guess I won't have to go, after all," he said, his face growing stern. "You boys hide out back there. The sheriff's comin' up the trail. That's why he let you loose, Slim—to see which way you would go. But he can't touch you boys, at that. Slope, and I'll have it out with him here an' now!"

Odell and Olsen hurried to the rear of the house, where Ricky told his friend what Campbell had told him.

"And now," he said, "I've got to see Hope and tell her." His lips tightened.

"Tell her what?" Slim demanded in a puzzled voice.

"Tell her that I killed a man," replied Odell tartly. "Do you think I'm goin' to let somebody else tell her first?"

Slim shrugged his shoulders. He looked around the corner of the house. Then he nodded soberly to Odell. "It's him—the sheriff," he announced "Campbell stopped him at the rail."

AT this moment, Odell caught sight of Hope near the rear porch of the house. He called to her softly, and when she turned, he held up a warning finger and hurried toward her.

"I've got to see you alone," he said breathlessly when he came up to her. "Isn't there some place—behind a bush or in the trees—where I can talk to you a minute or two?"

She led the way to an arbor at the side of the house, where they couldn't be seen. When she saw his eyes, a swift look of concern came into her own.

"What is it, Ricky?" she asked anxiously. "You're excited."

"And I have good reason to be," he said soberly. He put his hands on her shoulders and looked down at her. "You remember what I told you, Hope—that I would never tell you anything but the truth?"

"Why, yes," said the girl. "And I've believed you, Ricky. Oh, something is the matter, just as I suspected." A mist came into her eyes as she spoke, but it didn't develop into tears.

"Yes, something is the matter. Now you mustn't interrupt me, Hope. You must listen to everything I have to say—at least, I ask you to. I have to hurry, for the sheriff is here."

He paused to make sure they were alone, and in that pause she threw an arm about his shoulders. He could feel the tension in her soft, warm body so close to him, and for a moment he was overwhelmed with his desire to love her and protect her and have her for his very own.

"Last night—or early in the morning—I killed a man," he confessed unsteadily, holding her tightly to him as if he were afraid she would slip away. Her eyes were closed, and he kissed them.

"I had never killed a man before," he went on in a stronger voice. "It shook me up a bit, and it was your appearance this morning, like an angel out of a dark sky, that drew me out of it. A man cannot think dark thoughts or remember unpleasant things, and look at you, girlie. I wanted to be the first to tell you."

She opened her eyes. "I understand," she said clearly.

"There was no other way, Hope—I swear it," he said fervently. "The man was a gambler, and I think some kind of an outlaw, but I'm not at all sure. I'm not tryin' to hide behind anything. I had to do it! He forced the fight, but I let him do it, because I believed he was a scoundrel. When it came to the draw, it was to be one of us. I saw to it that it was him. They can't do a thing to me, Hope—but that isn't the point. It's a fact we can't get around—that I've killed a man. Maybe your father will tell you about it, but I won't. That's what I wanted to tell you, that—and one—other—thing."

As he ceased speaking, she looked up at him.

"It seems as though I'd known you for years, Ricky Odell," she said softly. "You come out of nowhere, without notice, and bring something—something exciting, almost boisterous, sometimes sad, into my life. But I can tell by your eyes that you are being truthful with me. I'm so sorry—so awfully sorry—to hear this, Ricky. It gives me a chill all over; it makes me feel—oh, I don't know how it makes me feel! What—was the other thing you wished to tell me?"

There was a long pause before Ricky spoke. "Hope, I'm as good as most of 'em—and that's all I've got to say in my favor. I swept out of the clouds and met an angel. That was you. I knew it the moment I saw you. Something queer happened inside of me. I've no right to tell you what I'm goin' to tell you. I'm goin' to tell it to you even if I never see you again! You won't understand it, perhaps, and maybe you won't believe it. It's something I've never told a girl before. Oh, if you'll only believe me. Hope—I love you!"

"I know it, Ricky. Maybe it's just a fancy at this time, but you honestly believe it. No man has ever told me such a thing before. Not that they haven't tried, but they've always stopped short and bungled, and I've never urged them on. I don't know how I feel, but I'm a different girl when I'm with you. You're not just a cow-puncher, Ricky Odell, and I don't believe you're just a gambler. Tell me, Ricky. Are you a gun fighter?"

It seemed as though the sun shone in her face at his smile.

"I'm not that, Hope, in any sense of the word," he declared. "I had to work fast last night, and folks may put me down as one. But they're wrong. I had to learn to handle a gun, Hope. There was no way o' gettin' out of it. I had to learn even while I was a kid with 'em lifting me into a saddle on a real horse." There was a note of humor in his voice, yet his eyes were not smiling. "But I'm not a gunman, as they take the word on the range."

"Then I guess that's all that matters," she said in a low voice. "Yes, I guess—that's all I care about."

His eyes lighted with the brilliancy of a sparkling star. He drew her to him, her head a flood of gold upon his shoulder. He bent over her and kissed her lips.

Then he drew away as suddenly as it all had happened. He looked out and saw Slim walking toward the front of the house. The sheriff knew they were there, then.

"I've got to go out and take part in the conversation, sweetheart," he told her lightly, setting his hat at its usual angle.

"Ricky!" She ran to him, threw her arms about him, and kissed him impetuously. "Don't let 'em put anything over on you!"

Her eyes were shining, and he laughed.

"Why, Hope, sweet, I've been lookin' for your sort all these twenty-four years that're hangin' from my shoulders. I'll get you yet! So long."

WHEN Ricky walked jauntily out of the arbor to the front of the house, he saw Sheriff Lane, Campbell, and Slim Olsen standing near the bench where he and Campbell had already talked earlier in the morning.

Ricky strode toward them. He felt different this morning—more confident, more aggressive,with a feeling of jubilation behind it all. Hope must love him, and that was all in the world that mattered; for the rest of it, he didn't care a snap of his fingers. As he drew up to the little group, he looked squarely at the sheriff.

"I'm reckoning I'm the man you want to see," he said in a crisp voice. "If you had waited around a bit, I'd have been back to town and in your office by noon."

"No doubt," remarked Lane dryly. "Why did you hot-hoof it up here so fast after the killing?"

"To tell Campbell, here," replied Ricky shortly. "He's the only person hereabouts that has shown any friendliness toward Slim and me, and I thought he ought to know what had happened. He gave Pearlman his notice last night, and I wanted him to know that it wouldn't be necessary for him to go to town to-day."

"So Pearlman was up here," said the sheriff sternly. He turned to Slim. "And you lied to me!"

"He didn't do any such thing," sang Ricky. "Slim didn't see Pearlman. I saw him, because I sneaked out here through the trees and watched and listened. Don't think I'm not tellin' the truth." He looked at Campbell. "Didn't you tell him?" he asked.

"Sure I told him," said Campbell promptly.

"There you are, sheriff," said Ricky impudently.

"You saw Pearlman, and you heard what was said up here, and you went back to town for the very purpose of dragging Pearlman into a gun play and shootin' him down," Lane accused sternly.

"I have plenty of witnesses that Pearlman picked the fight almost the instant Slim and me entered the Board of Trade," said Ricky in a ringing voice. "He forced the business from the start, with me tellin' him time and time again to lay off us and leave us alone. Would he do it? Fat chance! He was out to get me from the beginning. He carried it to a point where I slapped him in the face. He could have chose a fist fight if he had wanted. But he went for his gun! Then I gave it to him for keeps."

"I don't suppose Campbell, here, sent you to do that very thing," suggested Lane.

"Kindly confine your conversation to intelligent remarks and questions," shot Ricky. "You know better than that!"

"We'll assume he didn't," snapped Lane. "But you could have pulled Pearlman along, in that business. You could have urged him on to a showdown for the purpose of killing him."

"We'll assume I did," Ricky retorted swiftly. "But just how and by what means could you prove it? I'm tellin' you straight that Slim and me are visiting up here—not at this place, but in this country. We're minding our own business. Do you think I'm goin' to let anybody like that Pearlman run me out or take his insults? Not on your life! It was the first time I ever killed a man. Do you think I thank him for it? Here we are. You know the facts. Now, Mr. Sheriff, what're you goin' to do about it?"

"Me? I'm goin' to ask Campbell for a glass of his home-made blueberry wine," replied Lane blandly. "Come on, John."

Ricky and Slim watched them walk away, and then stared at each other blankly.

CHAPTER XIV.

RICKY TELLS HIS PAL.

RICKY and Slim started to sit down on the rustic bench, when a voice called to them from the front porch. It was Hope, standing at the top of the steps, beckoning to them to come.

"C'mon, Slim," ordered Ricky, taking his friend by an arm. "No more kitchen for us; we're in right this time."

"Leave it to you," grunted Slim. "And, by the way, Rick, that sheriff's no fool. I had one of the hardest, two-fisted, word battles with him I ever had in my life. I thought maybe he would follow me up here, but I couldn't see that it would make much difference."

"It hasn't," grinned Ricky. "You handled your end perfect."

By this time, they had reached the bottom of the steps, and Hope was a vision of loveliness above them. Her eyes sought Ricky's, asking a question.

"All clear sky," he told her. "And this wretched prairie tramp has something on his mind about—er—breakfast."

"Why—I didn't say any such thing!" blurted Slim, his face growing red to the roots of his hair.

Ricky stepped back, apparently aghast, while Hope's laugh rippled on the breeze.

"Look at him, Hope!" exclaimed Ricky. "He's blushing! I've known that lad since the time when they used to set us down on the prairie to play with a prickly pear, and this is the first time I ever saw him blush—except when cashing in a satchelful of poker checks!"

"Come up on the porch," the girl invited. "I knew you'd want some breakfast, Slim, and you're going to have it in a minute."

"You're not goin' to take him into the dining room, are you, Hope?" said Ricky anxiously. "I don't believe Slim has been inside a private house in——"

"That'll do!" Olsen interrupted. "Miss—er—Hope, you needn't be afraid of my table manners, nor of my appetite, for that matter. And if you wish to offer me some breakfast, I shall be most pleased to accept, since I suspect this roughneck already has had his." He concluded with a slight bow.

Hope looked at him and at Odell with a puzzled smile.

"That's all right, Hope," said Ricky cheerfully. "Nothin' wrong with him. He talks like that."

So Hope laughed again and went inside, promising to call Slim in a minute, and leaving them to their cigarettes on the porch.

Slim looked at Ricky appraisingly.

"So you've put her on the list, too, eh?" he said. "Didn't take long, either."

"Now lay off that stuff," Ricky warned. "I've told you already where I stand in this business. I'm not foolin', Slim."

"That's all right with me." Slim nodded. "But don't try to make me the butt of any of your jokes. I can sling a little language myself, and mix some sarcasm an' irony where they'll bite harder than humor, boy, an' I'm tellin' you."

Ricky looked at him in surprise.

"I didn't intend to make you the butt of any jokes, Slim," he said slowly. "I wouldn't hurt your feelings on a bet, if I could hurt 'em as a friend. But I'm happy and gay this bright, sunny mornin', and I'm not tellin' you why I am."

"You should be," Slim decided aloud on general principles. He threw his cigarette away as the girl came again to the door.

"Come on, Slim," she said very pleasantly. "And I'm going to wait on you myself."

"Then maybe I won't be able to eat," grumbled Slim, as he followed her inside.

HOPE had put his breakfast on the table, and now, as he sat down, she brought in the coffee. Slim began to eat without hesitation, and she watched him, feeling a bit awkward. There were several questions she would have liked to ask him, but she couldn't bring herself to put the queries.

He looked up at her suddenly.

"What time did Rick get up here?" he asked.

"At sunrise, I think," she answered with a smile. "I was out for a morning ride on Bismarck, and met him on the trail."

"Huh! The sunrise trail, eh? Do you like Ricky very much?"

The girl flushed, and then cooled at the direct question and his straightforward gaze.

"Why, yes," she replied. "It isn't hard to like Ricky, is it? Don't you like him?"

"Yes," answered Slim shortly. "He's my pal, so why wouldn't I? Just want to tip you off that he's a pretty good sort. Heard about his troubie? He said he was goin' to tell you."

"Yes, he told me," said the girl eagerly. Perhaps this queer youth was going to tell her something more.

Slim Olsen waited until he had finished his meal. Then, over a last cup of coffee, he looked at her steadily and spoke again.

"You don't want to hold that business against him," he said slowly, earnestly. "Rick couldn't get out of it. The man he had to shoot—to protect his own life—picked the quarrel, and forced it to a gun play. Rick was lucky enough to beat him to it, that's all. He's square both ways from the jack. I wouldn't like it much if he really liked any girl, and she gave him the run-around."

As he drank his coffee, Hope flushed again—this time with annoyance.

"If you've finished," she said coldly, "we'll go out on the porch."

"Don't get mad at me, Miss Hope," he said as he rose from the table. She learned to her surprise that he had a good smile. "The boys call me a woman hater, but I'm not. I'm just—I don't understand 'em, and I don't believe any other man does—Ricky the least of all. And just because I'm stickin' up for him in my queer way, don't think that that boy's any angel. Come on."

Hope laughed, and was happy again, and they went out on the porch.

"Did he leave anything?" Ricky Odell inquired mildly.

"He left me with a good impression," laughed Hope.

Ricky looked quickly at his friend in genuine surprise. Slim favored him with a supercilious glance and a faint smile.

"I learn more about that fellow every day," Ricky sighed.

At this juncture, John Campbell suddenly appeared around the corner of the house.

"You two go out in the bunk house and catch some sleep," he commanded. "Vagle's waitin' to show you a couple of nice, clean bunks. You didn't have any sleep last night, and none too much the night before. You're goin' to need a clear head, because we're all goin' to town as a sort of formality, so the sheriff says. Now do as I say. Look at that fellow!" He pointed to Slim, who was caught yawning.

"It was the breakfast," Slim explained lamely. "I always yawn after meals."

This brought a laugh from Ricky. "Let's go," he told Slim. "We can stand some sleep, and we'll ride down in the late afternoon."

"That's right," said Campbell. "Come ahead. Here's Vagle now. Hope, I'll tell you and mother what this is all about later. Boys will be boys, an' I'm an old man and a foolish one, at that. Nothin' to even think about. All right, you fellows, come along."

RICKY sat on the edge of his bunk after he had drawn off his boots, and stared through the window at the sun-flecked green of the trees. Slim was undressing, and he looked sharply at his friend from time to time, frowning slightly. By the time Slim was snug in his bunk, Ricky had gone so far as to pull off his shirt. His finely muscled arms and shoulders gleamed brown against the white undershirt. It was a tan which came from swimming in the rivers to southward during the long, hot summer.

"What's eatin' you, Rick?" demanded Slim.

"I'm just thinkin'," said Ricky.

"Thinkin' about that girl, I suppose," Slim conjectured.

"You guessed it the first time out," replied Ricky.

Slim sat up in the bunk. He couldn't remember that he had ever seen his partner in just this mood before—not over a girl, at least. Well, this Hope was about everything a man could want.

"You in earnest about that girl, Rick?" he asked sharply. "I mean, are you actually hit?"

"I'm hit harder than you think, boy," was Ricky's quick retort. "A whole lot harder than you think—take it straight from me."

"Humph!" grunted Slim. But there was a slight film of worry in his eyes. "You might as well tell me about it, Rick. I'm not fooling, you know."

"I told her about the shootin' this morning, Slim. Oh, I didn't put in any plug for myself, and didn't give her any details. I just said I had to do it. To get right down to cases, I did lure that Pearlman on. I did it to—well, you know why I did it. She asked me just one thing. She wanted to know if I was a gun fighter, and I told her no. That was true enough. And I told her I had to learn to be lightning with my gun. You know that's true, Slim, don't you?"

"How well I know it!" exclaimed Slim.

"And you just about had to learn, too," said Ricky vehemently, "living there on the ranch with us. You know how dad was. After they put his gun arm out of commission, he swore he'd make me the fastest man with a gun that country had ever seen. Why, Slim, we were both luggin' guns around almost as soon as we could walk. They gave us empty guns to play with! Dad used to keep me at it three or four hours at a crack, and you with me lots of times. You're mighty fast yourself, Slim, but it's as natural for me to pull a six-gun in a wink as it is to rub my eye if I get something in it!"

"Sure." Slim nodded. "I know it, Rick. But you never shot anybody before. Did you tell her that?"

"I think I did. Yes, I'm pretty sure I did. But I told her something else, Slim, that was more important than this shootin' or anything else—the most important thing I ever told anybody in my life, so help me!"

Slim Olsen was watching him closely. He was listening intently, and he was thinking hard—thinking ahead of Odell's story.

"What did you tell her, Rick?" he asked quietly.

"I told her that I loved her," Ricky confessed slowly. "And I meant it more than anything I ever said. I told her so that she believed me. And I held her in my arms and kissed her. She's the sweetest girl I ever met, Slim, and I want her, and I'm goin' to have her! I'm declaring myself."

For some time, Slim was silent, looking out the window. He was quiet so long that Ricky looked at him curiously.

"Do you believe me, Slim?" he asked in a low voice.

"Dog-gone it, yes!" blurted Slim. "And there's the rub. Play square with the girl, and I'm at your back every

second in any kind of a play. She's the real goods, and a lady, if I ever saw one. But let's get some sleep, Ricky. We can't tell what'll come up next, and we've got to be wide awake and careful."

JOHN CAMPBELL had a large root cellar built into the side of a slope behind the barn. The stream flowed just beneath it. It served as a refrigerator in the summer, and it was warm in the winter. He kept his vegetables and other provisions, such as meat, ham, and bacon, there, and in addition a stock of several jugs of the home-made elderberry and blueberry wine, which Sheriff Tom Lane had mentioned when he and John took leave of Ricky and Slim.

Campbell and the sheriff sat just outside the root cellar in the shade, for the September sun was hot. In a month they could expect the first "young" blizzard, harbinger of the Indian summer and the winter to come. It was about this that they talked as they sipped the sweet wine, each waiting for the other to lead the conference into the channel which it was bound to enter.

"I guess it's up to you, Tom, to say what's on your mind," said John Campbell, with a steady look at the sheriff.

"I've got two or three things on my mind, naturally," was Lane's answer to the challenge. "And I suppose I might as well get 'em off. There's no use in you and me stalling each other, John. And first of all, I'll confess I'm suspicious about your connection with these young bucks. You protected them that first night, although we both know now that there wasn't any need of it, for this Odell is sure-fire fast with his gun."

"You'll remember what I told you in your office that night," said Campbell. "I told you about Pearlman bein' in town, and I told you what he wanted. We had a little talk about it, and if you'll remember it just this once, and then forget it, you just the same as agreed with me that the only way out was for me to get Pearlman into a gun play and do for him. That's the night these young fellows got into a mix-up with him, and I butted in, expectin' to have to draw with Pearlman. He fooled me, and I didn't have the chance. That's the way that was, and that's the way I met this Odell an' Slim."

"I know you said you wouldn't match guns with Pearlman any way except fairly," said the sheriff. "Then they came up here, and stumbled on your place and found you?"

"Exactly. They've told you about it, eh? They were goin' over the divide without enough grub, and thought they would come to a town. Ira Crowell gave 'em a note to deliver to Hope, an' told 'em where the house was. That's how they came to know this place." Campbell didn't see fit to tell Lane anything about the youths' talk of taking up homesteads.

"That tallies with their stories," he said, frowning. "And Pearlman came up that night."

"That's right." Campbell nodded. "I sent 'em to the back of the house to keep out of sight, but Odell, as he says, stole through the trees and heard every word that passed between Pearlman and me—which was pretty hot. I gave him till sunset to-day to get out of town and off the range."

Sheriff Lane whistled softly. "I see—I see," he said. "Now I begin to understand. Odell knew what you were up against."

"I suppose so, but——"

"Let me go on with this," Lane interrupted. "Odell likes your daughter. Oh, don't blow up! Don't you think I've got eyes? He didn't want you to get into a gun play with Pearlman, partly or wholly on her account. Can't you see that? I thought maybe you deliberately sent the two of 'em to town to get Pearlman. I even thought you

might have some kind of a deal on with them. That was what Pearlman hinted when he accosted Odell.

"They went down there, and Odell egged Pearlman on in a slick way, protectin' himself all the time, until he actually forced Pearlman into the finish where he didn't have a chance. As a matter of fact, it was the mention of the girl that caused Odell to slap Pearlman and bring on the shooting!"

Campbell looked at him as though stunned.

"Now listen, John," said Lane confidentially, "no one is goin' to know about this except you and me. Those fellows won't tell. Didn't I try for an hour to get something out of that Slim, and wasn't he too slick for me? There's a boy that's as bright as a dollar before it leaves the mint. And Odell is one gunman out of a thousand.

"They're still standing around down in town, talkin' about his draw against Pearlman. It was like blinking your eye quick. As I've said, we've got to see the county attorney as a sort of formality, but I'm goin' to let this thing go as it is—on the face of it. There'll be no charge against Odell."

"A gunman is right!" exclaimed Campbell. "But so danged young! An' the other—smart, you say? And looks like a dummy."

"Exactly." Lane smiled. "I'd like to know more about that pair, and I'm goin' to let 'em run free, wide, and handsome. If anybody's on their trail, I'll soon find out. I can't say that I blame Odell much, under the circumstances. He's young, and able—and maybe he did us a favor, after all. Anyway, Pearlman is out of the way. Are —are there any others, John?" He eyed the other carefully, and saw Campbells' jaw clamp shut.

"No!" shot Campbell, through his teeth.

But Tom Lane read another answer in the cool, gray eyes. He frowned.

"John," he said, lowering his voice a bit, "I know you didn't turn a trick all summer. I know about every move you made. You turned back from Culbertson after shippin' some cattle from there. I've told you before that I'm willin' to help, and I'm tellin' you so again."

He paused to light a cigar and finish his glass of wine. "I know now for a certainty that the cattlemen are goin' to make you a proposition, and if you take it, it will mean that I'll have to make you a deputy. Sometimes it's nice and handy to be a deputy, John."

Campbell looked him straight in the eyes, but could read nothing there. He was thinking of a man named Brackett. He wondered if the sheriff knew. But he wouldn't have asked him for the world. He put the empty glasses in the cellar, swung the heavy door shut, and they walked down toward the house.

Will Brackett appear? Don't miss the fourth installment of "Prairie's End," appearing in next week's issue of Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine.

NEW TREES FOR THE WEST

NOT only men and women have come from every country in the world to settle in the West and help develop its vast resources, but latest reports tell us that the seeds of hundreds of species of trees, gathered in many foreign lands, are being sown in the forest service arboretum at Wind River, Oregon, to test their suitability for growing in the Pacific Northwest. The trees which are best fitted to endure the climate will later be planted in favorable areas of that section of the country and will mark one more useful contribution of the Old World to the New.

THAT CLOWN HORSE

By E. C. LINCOLN

Author of "A Cougar Alibi," etc.

IN one way, at least, horses are much like men. Some are born to be heroes; some, outlaws; some, patient drudges; some, clowns. Squint-eye, the pinto, was born a clown.

The mouse-colored mare that was his mother did not know it. On that sunny morning in early May, when Squint-eye first saw daylight in a protected corner of the Warm Creek country, she had looked down upon him and thought him beautiful; but the aged mare had borne many colts, bay, and black, and sorrel, and brown, each of which had had its place in her affections. Nature, however, must have laughed in her sleeve at the practical joke that she was playing.

Squint-eye was the homeliest colt ever born in Montana. His baby coat of fuzzy hair already showed the markings that were later to make him famous. Over a groundwork of white, Nature had painted bay overalls reaching to the shoulders and haunches. Body, neck, and head were unmarked, save for two apostrophes of bay hair which hooked upward from the corners of the pink-lipped mouth, prolonging it into the grin of a drunken sailor. The right eye shone an innocent blue; the left was colorless, and the breadth of two fingers above it an arched eyebrow had been sketched heavily. His nose was Roman, his legs even more knobby and helpless and gangling than is usually the case.

When the morning sun had warmed his little body sufficiently, the baby colt lifted his head and tried to gather those ungainly props under him. He failed at first and plopped down on the grass and lay panting. But at last his strength came flooding back, and at the fourth attempt he was standing up, tiny

hoofs sprawled wide apart, knees wavering as they threatened every moment to buckle under his body's weight and send him tumbling on his nose again.

Even the gray coyote lying hidden in the willow brush must have chuckled to himself at what he saw; and Squint-eye, gazing timidly about him at a strange world that refused to come into focus, ended by wrinkling his upper lip and grinning his first grin of embarrassment and delight.

A few days later, when he followed close at his mother's flank as she trailed slowly through the hills in search of the Flying A cavvy, he had already grown into quite a little horse, at least in his own estimation. But he trembled as the circle of curious animals, like, yet somehow unlike, his own mother, came crowding up to welcome him into the band. At last, when he sensed that they meant him no harm, that they really liked new little colts, even if they were homely, and that they had come to demonstrate their interest, he did what no well-mannered youngster should think of doing. With a quick squeal of derision he bolted under the stomach of a mild and ancient gelding, and went bucking and kicking through the band, giving them all the equine razzberry for stiff-necked old fossils who certainly needed new blood to pep them up. From that moment on, Squint-eye was the joke of the Flying A horse range. Squint-eye knew it and liked it.

IT was early spring when he first tucked in his knobby legs and stood up to view the world. It was midsummer before Scot Wilson and Billy McLane came riding down from the bench to check up on the new crop of colts, preparatory to running the bunch into the corrals for branding. Even good stuff was going for a song that year. Only the very best of the lot would be worth the trouble to handle.

So Scot Wilson, who owned the Flying A spread, every hoof and hide and horn of it, was far from cheerful as he noted animal after animal that failed to come up to the rather exacting standards which he had set. Billy, who rode at his side, wasn't worrying in the least. That lean-flanked, broad-shouldered young top hand was secretly reckoning that the fewer colts the old man kept, the fewer there'd be for him to gentle when three years had gone by—always provided some crazy bronc didn't get him in the meantime. He lounged comfortably in his saddle as he rode, and grunted lazy agreement when the old man uttered his caustic comments concerning the type of horse that his breeding stock persisted in producing.

On the crest of a sage-grown rise the owner came to a halt and pointed ahead with a gnarled forefinger. "There's another bunch, Billy," he said. "Bet there ain't a decent colt in the lot. Take me up?"

The younger rider grinned and shook his head. "Nope," said he, "I wouldn't bet on nothin'—not with my luck runnin' like she is. Look 'em over and tell us the worst, boss."

Scot Wilson frowned as he drew his range glasses from the saddle pocket and trained them on the little band of breeding stock that grazed in the creek bottom half a mile away. For a long minute he was silent; then he swore earnestly before he handed the glasses to his companion.

"You take a look, Billy. See if you see what I do. That one right by the point o' that yeller cut-bank, where she heads down to the crick. Is that a hawse, or what?"

The other leveled the glasses. "That paint colt?" he inquired. "Yeah, I got him now. Wait a second."

The second passed. Several seconds passed. The boy's sunburned forehead wrinkled into lines of perplexity. He lowered the binoculars, rubbed his eyes

with the back of his hand, and tried again. At last he whistled.

"Is that feller a hawse, or what?" repeated his boss.

"Reckon you win," Billy chuckled. "It's a *what,* all right. Yessuh, about half Holstein, I reckon, with a dash o' Hereford and Jersey throwed in. What's left is most likely horse. Lots o' mustard in the li'le feller, though. Watch him chase off that old claybank, will you?" And again the bronc fanner smiled his amusement at what he saw in the bright field of the lenses.

"Huh," grunted the Flying A's owner. "Couldn't give him away, I couldn't. Not even to them bum cowboys that's eatin' me into the sheriff's hands. Take your rifle along when you run this bunch in, Billy. Ain't no use botherin' with *him.*"

Half a mile away, Squint-eye, the pinto, being unaware of the sentence of death just passed upon him, squealed and kicked up his heels and clowned through the horse herd to the scandal of his elders and the secret delight of his brother colts. He was the homeliest horse in the country. Why worry about what couldn't be helped?

TWO weeks later Squint-eye mislaid every atom of his confidence. One morning his heart beat till it almost burst his ribs, because a group of horsemen suddenly appeared from nowhere and closed in about the band with whooping and yelling and swinging ropes. Squint-eye ran along with the rest—desperately, blindly; so blindly that at last he found himself dodging about in a great circle of peeled poles that smelled of iron and burned flesh and danger. Around and around that circle he ran, till his knees trembled and his coat became dripping wet with sweat.

When his turn came, and one of those snakelike ropes shot hissing at him and tangled about his forefeet, jerking him to the earth in a fall that made him see stars, he was too exhausted to think of fighting; too terrified even to know what was going on as Billy McLane picked up the hot iron and sketched a neat, red Flying A on his left hip.

"There," said Billy. "I'm sure curious to see what a li'le hawse as homely as you was ever put in this world for, anyways. You ain't half-sized. You ain't nothin'. If the boss hadn't gone to town to-day you wouldn't even be that. Yessuh, I'm sure curious, and I aims to find out. Hop out o' there, Squint! And don't let the old man see you, can you help it."

Thirty minutes more, and the weary pinto was shoving his ungainly shoulders through the struggling crowd in the corral gate, out into the familiar grass lands of the creek bottom. For three days Squint-eye was a much subdued colt; then the spot on his hip stopped itching, the memory of the pole corrals grew dim, and he returned to his mischief-making with all his old enthusiasm.

Blissfully ignorant that he was supposed to be dead, Squint-eye earned for himself a unique place on the Flying A horse range. His nose might be hooked, and his knees knobby; but between those two ill-mated eyes was plenty of space. As month after month rolled past the colt was learning steadily; learning from experience, learning faster than his brothers because his energy and curiosity were without limit. He chased jack rabbits in gloriously exciting races that stretched out his lungs and rounded his ribs. He tackled bigger game in the slinking gray coyotes; and they, too, furnished splendid exercise until he learned that if he chased them too far out of sight of his friends they were apt to gang up on him and send him back faster than he had come. He clowned among his betters. He delighted in raising his head suddenly with a snort of pretended alarm, then leading the

frenzied stampede to safety, till the cooler-headed ones came to learn that his signals were mostly practical jokes and refused to pay him any more attention. He nipped and kicked and tormented, and wrinkled up his nose in derision till there was not an animal in the band that did not lay back its ears and sidle out of the way when Squint-eye came wandering innocently past them.

Even the great black stallion that ruled the valley pretended not to notice the pinto if he could possibly help it. Squint wouldn't stay to fight, and chasing him out of the bunch did no good at all. It merely meant having him circle round at a safe distance all the rest of the day—two days if necessary—nickering insults until the black stallion gave up in disgust and allowed him to return without punishment.

At three years, the paint horse was the quickest four-footed thing on the ranch, a deceptive quickness, because to the casual eye he looked even homelier and more awkward than when he had first made his appearance. Underweight, still knobby of knee and hock joint, his sinews were twisted steel and his heart tireless. It was the sheerest sort of miracle that Scot Wilson had never set eyes on him since the day he had ordered the pinto's death.

Billy McLane knew this. He had, in fact, helped the miracle along on several occasions. He had watched the little horse in his clownish antics more than once, and an increasing curiosity had developed in him as to just what the pinto would prove to be when saddle broke. Meanwhile he waited, and tried to see that Squint was out of the way whenever the old man chanced to be riding about.

It was late in August of Squint's third year when this state of affairs came to an end. As usual, the pinto himself was the cause of all the trouble. With eight hundred whitefaces on a drive to the railroad, Scot Wilson had decided to save time and distance by taking them through the horse pasture to the shipping corrals. The red sun was low on the western horizon, and the long line that wound slowly up the valley in clouds of thick dust was growing restless. Thirsty steers sought continually to break from the column and head for water. Slicker Barnes, riding point, looked worried as he glanced back over his shoulder. Flankers swore while they hurried their weary mounts dripping with sweat. But Scot Wilson, in the drag, was pushing them on. Two miles more and the herd could be thrown through the south fence of the horse pasture onto the flat where the white corrals lay along the railroad. Delay now meant half a day's hard riding in the morning.

And then upon the crest of the hills to the west appeared a group of horses trailing down to water. They stopped stiff-legged at the sight of that rolling dust cloud in the valley below them, tense and alert for flight. Squint-eye was among them.

He sidled into the front rank to see better, his blue eye bright with interest, his white one gleaming maliciously. Here was a chance for making trouble not to be neglected! With a sudden snort of excitement he leaped forward down the slope in a rattling shower of pebbles, slipping and sliding on his haunches as the band wheeled and raced away in terror.

Blind to their desertion Squint-eye came on alone, his hoofs drumming a wild tattoo on the sun-baked earth. Straight across the flat he raced, straight toward the head of that column of restless whitefaces. Slicker Barnes saw him coming and spurred to turn him off. Squint-eye dodged and thundered on his way, stretching every muscle to cut across in front of those marching steers. It was too much.

AS Squint-eye flashed under their very noses the foremost animals checked, bellowed, and stopped short. Then tails kinked and hoofs rattled, and the spooky column of eight hundred thirsty animals exploded like a covey of prairie chickens, overwhelming flankers and drag alike, boiling in every direction over the flat to vanish into the coulees and the willow brush. The work was done. Not a chance of bunching them before daylight.

Scot Wilson's broad face glowed purple with anger when he galloped up to the luckless Slicker and gestured about him at the flying stragglers that still dotted the valley.

"What do I pay yuh for? What started 'em anyhow?" he roared.

For answer, the point man jerked his thumb at Squint-eye, the pinto, now dipping his white muzzle lazily in the creek a short rifle shot away.

"It's him!" he snarled. "That doggone locoed paint hawse come bustin' up right in their faces, an'——"

The eyes of the Flying A's owner were narrowing in astonishment. "Huh!" he grunted thoughtfully. Then, "Where's Billy McLane? I want that guy, and I want him quick."

Billy came. And Billy, seeing the cause of the trouble, shut his mouth and waited for his employer to speak first.

"Look-a-here," growled Scot. "Ain't that the pinto I told you to shoot, clean back three year ago?"

Billy, looking at his boss, decided it was no time to temporize. "Yeah," he drawled, "but I warn't hired to shoot hawses."

There was silence for the space of a deep breath; then Scot Wilson's hand flashed toward his six-gun, only to stop with a jerk as Billy's fingers closed upon his wrist.

"No, you don't," said the boy. "You says there warn't a guy on the ranch that'd ride that li'le hawse. Well, there is. Me. I start trainin' him next Tuesday, see? An' if you don't like it you'd better make out my time right now, Scot."

The owner of the Flying A remembered just quickly enough that good top hands were mighty scarce. He remembered, too, that Billy had recently tucked away a nice little legacy from the estate of an Eastern relative. At last he said "Huh!" twice, and rode off deep in the sort of silence that gives a grudging consent.

SO the days of Squint-eye's freedom came to an end, for Billy McLane was as good as his word. The diminutive pinto, for the second time in his life, found his heart throbbing with fear as he stood and shivered with four other frightened colts of his acquaintance to keep him company, in an inclosure of worn tamarack poles. But nothing happened, at least for a while, and he gradually recovered his courage, even to the extent that he no longer trembled when Billy brought hay to the corral and filled the zinc-lined trough with cold water. One after another, he watched his companions hazed out of the inclosure, to return later splashed with white foam and tired out. At last, one bright, sunny afternoon, Squint's own turn finally came.

He cocked his ears at the moving figures that he saw through the bars. He blew softly through his nose when Billy entered, leaving the gate open behind him. And when the man waved his arms he shot through that avenue of escape in a wild race for safety. Down the short lane he flashed; then he was in another corral, smaller than the first, though higher, and octagonal in shape.

A dozen of the Flying A waddies on hand to see the fun, squatted like buzzards on the topmost rails, and shouted friendly, though sarcastic, advice to

Billy McLane and the homely paint colt impartially.

"Watch out he don't bite yuh, Bill."

"Shake 'im up good, Squint! That feller owes me six-bits. Bust 'im wide open, li'le hawse!"

As Billy drew the cinch tight he paused a moment in reply to a direct question from Pete Connor.

"I ain't sure, Pete," he answered. "His eyes don't show me nothin' at all. Can't tell about that kind. Mebbe he'll fight me till he drops, or he'll mebbe step right off like he's broke ten years ago. Well, here goes!"

Squint-eye did neither. When the man reached forward and removed the blind he stood rigid for an instant, then backed rapidly till his haunches crashed into the solid fence. Up into the air he went—high up, with his nose tucked in between his forelegs. When he struck the ground for the second time he stopped as if in thought. Then he shook himself till the rigging rattled, relaxed every muscle, and sneezed.

"Nossuh," Billy McLane was telling, a month later, when Squint's training for the cow business was well under way, "there ain't no man on earth can tell what that homely li'le paint hawse'll do. You think it'll be one thing, but you know it won't. You can't even be sure it'll be the opposite. He's a clown hawse, for fair, if there ever was one."

And then, out of that very streak of mischief which had made him the pest of the range, Squint-eye developed into such a cutting horse as the Flying A had never seen. He could seldom be trusted to stand on a rope; he was too erratic for riding circle in the hills; but once the idea reached his compact little brain that when his rider pointed him at a cow and yelped "Take 'er out, Squint," he was at liberty to nip and kick and shoulder that animal till she came flying out of the milling herd in terror of her life, then Squint-eye was in his element.

SO the fame of the homely horse spread from one end of Montana to the other. Curious cow-punchers stopped at the ranch to see him work. More than one man dropped a dollar, betting he couldn't do the things folks said about him. Even Billy himself had been left gasping, when on a certain fall day he turned Squint into the corral without saddle or bridle, with a bald-faced steer its only other occupant.

He had opened the gate, and now stood back beside it, while he waved his arm at the steer, and shouted "Take him out, Squint! Take him out, you homely li'le cuss!"

For a moment Squint had hesitated; then he leaped at the astonished steer, nipping with his teeth, thrusting and battering with his shoulder till the two shot out through the gate like a cork popped from a bottle, the busy pinto getting one last nip of hide from the flying rump for good measure.

It was this trick that brought in the dollars. "Go round 'em, Squint!" passing riders would shout as they met Billy on the road; and Billy would grin back, not at all minding the imputation that his homely pinto was as smart as any sheep dog that ever lived.

But such days were too good to last. Trouble was coming for Billy; coming, too, for Squint. Trouble in the shape of a red-haired girl.

Billy remembered Scot's niece, Kay, as a thin-legged, giggling youngster of carroty braids and many freckles who had been always under foot one summer, five years ago. He was totally unprepared for the self-possessed young lady who now swept down upon them, kissed Scot Wilson till his wrinkled face flamed crimson with embarrassment, and announced that Uncle Scotty would have the pleasure of entertaining her until the first snows came in the fall.

Kay took to ranch life like the proverbial duck to water, and the ranch

adopted Kay with even greater enthusiasm. Every cow-waddy, every horse, cow, pig, dog, and chicken, engaged her delighted and flattering attention. But as the long summer days went by Billy McLane began to outdistance all competition. It was Billy who took her on the longest rides, Billy who taught her the fun of trout fishing in the icy creek that flowed down the valley. Billy who helped her saddle each morning, and sat on the ranch house porch with her when the stars dusted the soft darkness of the Montana sky at night.

And it was Billy's pinto, Squint-eye, that called forth every bit of that motherly instinct in the girl's nature, that queer kink of feminine character which makes the loveliest of women develop a proprietary affection for homely men, and bulldogs, and stray kittens. She rubbed Squint's ugly nose and fed him sugar till Billy McLane was almost jealous, and the little clown horse ate it all up, sugar and petting alike, and put on his best Sunday manners in her presence.

It was a continuous source of argument that often bordered on a real quarrel, that Billy would never let her ride Squint. "Nope," he would say, "that paint hawse, he ain't never had nobody on him but me, Kay, and he'd most likely break your neck. Can't *tell* what he'd do. Honest, girl, I jest don't dare take the chance."

And then Kay would pout, and threaten that she'd certainly steal a ride the very first chance she got; and Billy would have to wait perhaps two days before he could take her fishing again.

HER chance came one morning when only Sam-Henry, the ranch cook, was about the place. Not that she had planned it, for the girl had no real intention of running counter to Billy's wishes in the matter, but the temptation had come upon her suddenly—and it all seemed like such a good joke. Here she was, all ready to ride to town after the mail, and there was Squint-eye in the horse corral, and Billy looking for strays in the hills and not expected home before to-morrow. Not a soul to stop her! Such an opportunity as that was too good to miss.

Quickly she stripped the saddle from her own gray pony and eased it up on the homely pinto. With beating heart she swung cautiously to her seat and loosened the reins. Nothing happened. For once on his good behavior, Squint lived up to his reputation for doing the unexpected, and trotted off on the dusty road to town as though he had carried woman riders all his life.

Kay relaxed presently and sang to herself, chuckling at the thought of what she would tell Billy about his wild horse. The sage-grown miles, hot and pungent in the sunshine, drifted pleasantly by. Even at the open bridge over Skull Creek, where, unless Billy was watching closely, Squint had a habit of pretending to see a porcupine in the bushes ahead and backing off the planks into deep water, there was no sign of trouble. At last they were jogging comfortably into the nearer approaches of Main Street, between board sidewalks and frame buildings, with Kay more than a little delighted at the surprised attention she was attracting among the local population.

Squint-eye had been to town before —many times, in fact. Always Billy had ridden him up to the imposing white front of the Silver Dollar Saloon, dismounted, and tied him to the hitching-rack where he could doze peacefully till his master emerged again for the trip home. Any other procedure was unthinkable. So when Kay came abreast of the Silver Dollar and Squint-eye turned into his usual place, he was puzzled by the fact that a rein was pressing hard against his neck and two little heels tucked into his flanks were urging him on. Such a thing had never hap-

pened before! He stopped in his tracks to think things over.

"Come on, Squint," commanded Kay. Squint humped his back slightly, twitched his ears, and stood tight.

"Come on, darn you!" said Kay.

A bearded tramp, swinging his feet over the edge of the sidewalk, looked up with interest. Then the battle was on. Customers from the Silver Dollar poured out through the swinging doors to offer advice. A smiling crowd collected to watch the fun.

TEN minutes later, a red-haired girl, her pretty face scarlet with annoyance, was striding across Main Street, her high-heeled boots leaving tiny, deep imprints far apart in the soft dust. She whispered to herself as she walked. "You darned, balky, old *beast!*" she whispered. "You can just stay there till you freeze to death next winter, for all I care."

The pinto pony, still standing solidly by the Silver Dollar hitching-rack, turned his head to watch her, his one blue eye gleaming reproach.

Billy McLane heard about it twenty-four hours later, when he was yet twelve miles from home.

"Trouble at the ranch," said Slicker Barnes, who had ridden out to meet him. "Yessuh, Billy, I wouldn't be in no hurry to git back, was I you."

"How come?" asked Billy.

"Well," said Slicker, cocking one knee over his pony's neck and gazing thoughtfully at the distant horizon, "yuh know, Kay, she took that Squint-eye o' yourn, an'——"

"Hurt bad?"

"Hurt? Plenty hurt—in her feelin's, I reckon is all. Listen here cowboy ——" and Slicker told him the whole story, only slightly embellished by such artistic touches as his imagination could supply. "An'," he finished, "Kay walked home the whole seven miles. She's a-speakin' her intentions right out loud. She won't have nothin' more to do with a dumb cow-waddy named William McLane, an' if she ever sets eyes on that pinto again, she's leaving for the East. An' if Uncle Scotty was half a man he'd fire the both of 'em."

"Gosh! Oh, my good gosh!" moaned Billy. "What'd you reckon I'd better do, Slicker?"

But Slicker refused to be drawn further into the matter. "It warn't me was takin' her fishin'," he said.

Billy decided, two days later, that Slicker had understated the condition of things. Despite his desperate attempts to get back into the girl's good graces, Kay gave no sign of knowing that he had ever existed. At the table, on the ranch-house porch, at the horse corrals —it was all the same. Kay's eyes looked through and past the young cow-puncher without acknowledging his presence. Her ears were deaf to his pleadings. She developed a fondness for solitary rides, and vanished for hours at a time with her trout rod and creel. As a final gesture of contrition Billy turned Squint-eye out into the horse pasture, where he hung about the corrals for days, nickering hopefully at every rider that came past. The total effect on Kay was precisely nothing. The quarrel, which at first had seemed more or less of a joke, became a real tragedy for Billy McLane.

THUS two long weeks dragged on, till the afternoon came when Scot Wilson sent Billy down to the corrals to trim the hoofs of a Hereford steer that was limping badly. He had ridden into the inclosure and closed the gate behind him. The job wouldn't take long he decided. Time enough to sit and think for a while before going to work. So he climbed to the topmost rail and perched there brooding moodily, his unseeing eyes gazing across the valley pasture, while cigarette after cigarette burned down to his fingers. It

was fully an hour before a movement against the willow brush, almost a quarter mile away, caught his attention.

His shoulders straightened and his mind came back to earth with an almost painful alertness; for the moving figure was that red-haired girl, Kay Wilson. The trout rod in her hand showed that she had been fishing the creek and was now bent on taking a short cut across the open flat to the ranch gate. Clearly she had not observed his presence.

Billy looked anxiously about the valley. Squint-eye, the cause of all the trouble, was drifting slowly down toward the corrals, his curiosity aroused by the human presence. Out on the flat, too near for comfort to the course the girl was taking, a little band of cattle stood with raised heads, watching her approach. Range stock seldom troubles a man on foot, but these were different—half a dozen longhorns, and a few Bramas kept for riding and bulldogging at the rodeos. Ordinarily they ranged above the ranch buildings, but Pioneer Day was aproaching, and they had recently been moved to the horse pasture for greater convenience. Bramas were bad medicine. He had seen "Scoop" Tanner gored to a pulp at a little show on Elk Creek.

Even as Billy shouted his warning, and swung a leg over the rail, the thing happened. He saw a slate-gray Brama steer walk stiffly out from the bunch and stand pawing thin puffs of dust from the sun-baked earth. The red-haired girl, far out there on the flat, was waving frantically. The steer ceased pawing the ground and trotted toward her. Suddenly the girl began to run.

NO chance to reach her now! Billy McLane could only grip the rail till the blood oozed from his finger tips while he watched in terror as the steer, head swinging low, covered the distance that remained.

And then the man saw Squint-eye, the pinto; and he heard his own voice shouting in agony.

"Take him out, Squint! Take him out, Squint-hawse!"

The clown horse looked about him. His eyes fell on the charging steer. Squint-eye awoke. He pointed his ugly nose straight at the Brama, and he stretched his knobby legs till his round barrel almost brushed the grass as he tore the ground on the work that he loved best.

Could he do it? His path lay almost at right angles to the course of the charging animal. He had twice the distance to go. Billy's throat went dry, and perspiration streamed unheeded down his anguished face as he watched the pinto horse close the gap.

He saw the girl on her knees, her hands covering her face. He saw the slate-gray horror lunging forward a short rope's length away—heard the frantic scream that tore the still, hot air as the shadow of death drew close. And then eight hundred pounds of homely range horse struck that steer in the shoulders with the force of a bursting shell. A cloud of rising dust hid all the rest.

Two minutes later, Billy McLane was kneeling on the ground, with a red-haired girl, who sobbed, held tight in his arms.

"There, there, honey," he soothed, "that Squint-hawse, he ain't such a bad li'le rascal after all, is he?"

And he felt the girl's muscles go tense; and, wondering, he heard her say, "Did you say bad? I'll tell you this, Billy McLane. If I ever marry you it'll just be to give that little horse a good home."

Squint-eye, the clown pinto, had returned from giving that steer a lesson in manners. Now he wrinkled back his upper lip and grinned. People were sure funny, Squint-eye thought.

VALLEY VULTURES

By MAX BRAND

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters.

CHARLES DEXTER returns home after ten years. Finds his father's murderer is still at large. People who have taken over his father's property do not believe he is Dexter's son. Anson, former cowboy, who has returned with him, vouches for him. Anson is killed and marked with a peculiar M—the Scorpio Sign. Dean takes Dexter's terms to the men holding Dexter Valley. Secretly, Dexter follows, and hides in his old home, now occupied by Judge Benson. Dexter is discovered and pursued, while Dean is made prisoner.

(BACK NUMBERS ARE EASILY PROCURED.)

CHAPTER XXII.

A HOSTAGE.

ONE cannot hear the sound of approaching travelers without having the heart leap up, at least for a moment. And in that first moment I told myself that it was help coming toward me—the sheriff from Monte Verde, and a posse of trusty men—the little sheriff, coming through yonder door! How beautiful his half-witted look would be, in my estimation, now!

Then I saw the downward look of listening, and the savage, poisonous smile of satisfaction upon the face of Judge Benson. He was foretasting a frightful triumph. An Indian might wait thus for the return of the war party and the disposal of the prisoner.

His expression, after a moment, changed. He threw up his head. His eyes rolled.

"By the great——" he began. Then he stopped, and added, "What if——"

I knew what he meant. My own heart suddenly raged with joyous hope in my breast. What if young Dexter had escaped from their hands? What if he were gone from them? Then, what would they do with me? It might alter matters. If he were a prisoner beside me, I was a mere cipher. If he were still free, then I was dignified into the position of his friend.

The moment that I saw this thing, strength returned to me, and my shoulders squared themselves instinctively.

What gave him pause, and what gave me hope was the slow pace of those searchers. The victorious in the West are apt to come like wild Indians, with a yell and a rush, guns exploding. But there was no rushing and yelling here. The hoofbeats pattered like heavy, distant rain, but approached only very slowly.

He looked down at me, did the judge; and suddenly a devil made me smile at him. The thing was totally irresistible. I could not help the twitching at the corners of my mouth.

I thought he would go mad. The eyes literally started from his head, and striding up to me, he bent and shook a fist in my face. His great balled hand was almost as large as my whole head.

"Whatever happens to him, we've got you," said the judge with infinite relish.

Now, with that fist in my face, the same devil that had taken hold of me before made me answer: "I don't think that you'll ever be a complete fool, judge. Only a partial one, from time to time!"

And I deliberately patted my cut and swelling cheek with my handkerchief and I looked up into his infuriated eyes and searched them, deliberately.

If ever a man came close to death by a single blow, or by throttling, it was I.

Or was I really so close? Did I not realize, instinctively, that if young Dexter were free, all close danger was removed from me?

At any rate, there was no tremor in me as the riders came pouring slowly up around the house.

HALF a dozen of them trooped into the room, and the first face I saw was that of Dandy Bullen. The expression on it was to me like the most delicious music. It was salve on my wound, and balm for my soul. For he was as dark as the night outside, and he gave only a glowering glance to the leader of the clans, Judge Benson himself.

They did not report, at first. They asked for a drink, and got a ration of corn whisky from the Chinaman, who appeared mysteriously when needed, and disappeared again through the kitchen door with his pigtail wagging behind him.

Then Clay Livingston sat down and rested his face between his hands, but all of the others remained standing.

"Well? Well?" said the judge at last. "You've come back like a pretty pack, with your tails between your legs. Dogs? I wouldn't compare you with dogs! You've let one fox get away from you!"

Clay Livingston looked up, steadily, toward the judge, and his face was not a pretty study.

"He has my boy, Slade!" said he.

"He has—what?" shouted the judge.

"Tell him, somebody," said Livingston, and buried his face in his hands once more.

I felt a pang of pity for him, and yet wonder overcame me. I had seen the rush of those hunters. They had failed. Fleetness of foot and cunning might have saved Dexter, but actually to have caught Slade Livingston, big, formidable lad that he was, seemed utterly impossible; not only to save himself, but to take a prisoner in flight!

"You mean he shot down Slade? We'll have the law for it!" cried the judge, almost triumphantly. "We'll hang him for this. It's the end of him. The sheriff will have to take his trail, now. We'll make an end of him. Clay, my heart bleeds for you!"

"Blast you and your heart both!" said Livingston. "If you'd had a brain in your head, we'd 'a' settled the matter before it come to this."

Seeing that Livingston had been the chief malcontent when it came to a peaceful discussion, this remark was illogical enough, but the judge appeared unwilling to argue the point.

"Are you all dumb?" he shouted. "Will you tell me how it happened?"

"Slade ain't dead," said Bullen, "but Dexter has him!"

"Durned if I ever seen such a thing," said another.

"Not dead—but Dexter has him?" groaned the judge. "Then everything is spoiled! Slade—Livingston, can that boy hold his tongue? Will he talk?"

"How do I know? And why should I care how much he talks?" demanded Livingston.

And he glared toward me.

The judge, taking the hint, whirled around on me and snarled out some threat. But Livingston's voice rang out like the report of a gun.

"You treat this feller with gloves, Benson. You hear me? You treat this feller Dean like he was your own brother—or better—or you'll hear from me about it."

There was no doubt, of course, as to his meaning. Whatever they performed upon me, would be performed upon fine young Slade Livingston in requital.

I could afford to sit there and actually indulge in another smile with which I favored the judge, and his blackened face burst into a glistening sweat.

"Say something!" he roared, turning on the others. "What happened? Were you fools all paralyzed? Couldn't you ride? Couldn't you shoot?"

"We ride as well as the next," said Bullen sullenly. "But him—he can fade out like a ghost. I never seen anything like it. We rode. We seen him, too. We seen him go into the woods down on the Dinmont ranch, and when we seen that, we headed for him."

"Did you all rush blind into the trees?" exclaimed the judge.

"No, we done the right thing," said Bullen. "Livingston, there, was giving orders. He ain't no fool. He sent part of us down the Dinmont lane, and another chunk of the boys riding like blazes across the fields to the west of the woods, and him and Slade and two more went straight into the woods behind Dexter."

HE stopped, and shook his head. I was half stifled with excitement, and my head spun in bewilderment. I could not understand how such a man could effect anything against such enemies—not even such a man as Dexter.

"I was going to the left, between the woods and the water," said Bullen, while most of the others stared disconsolately at the floor, or helped themselves to another round of the corn whisky. "And I heard the hosses of the two Livingstons and the rest go crash into the wood. Then I didn't hear nothing more worth while, for a time, till suddenly I saw Chip Hooker, riding at my right, turn his hoss around with a terrible yell, pointing back.

"I turned around in the saddle, then, and what I seen was enough. I seen a pair of riders away off in the distance, and one of the hosses was poor Slade's pinto. I could tell that paint hoss by the slab of color along his side, looking white even at night. And right alongside of him, sort of hitched to him, there was another gent, and they were heading out of the tail of the Din-

mont woods, and straight over to the ford. They were almost at the edge of the water, when we seen 'em, Hooker and me!

"I couldn't believe it, hardly. How could anybody?

"He must've turned straight back, when he got inside of the woods, and instead of running any longer, he waited and he snagged Slade as Slade went piling by him in the dark of the trees. And then he started back toward the river, while Clay Livingston and the other two, they saw nothing because of the trees and they heard nothing because of the noise that their own hosses was making. Anyway, there was Slade being taken away, though how anybody the size of Dexter could've done——"

"Shut up your comments, and go on with what happened!" cried the judge. "What did you do then? Twiddle your thumbs and go home? You didn't follow across the ford?"

"We piled right down to the edge of the river," said Bullen, "and then out of the brush on the far bank comes a rifle bullet that tips my hat mighty polite for me!"

He took off his hat and showed us the neatly drilled hole through the crown of it.

"Would you've stayed there for Prince Charlie to shoot at you, judge?" he asked pointedly.

"You could have crossed at the lower ford!" shouted the judge. "You simply came back here and left in his hands a hostage who will mean——"

"Suppose that some of us watched the upper ford," broke in Bullen, "and the rest of the pack of us, went down to the lower ford, he would simply have faded away through the brush and been miles away. How could we tell when he was gone? Only by going down to the water's edge, every few minutes, and getting ourselves shot down. He tipped my hat for me, shooting right across the river, and there wasn't much moon for him to see by, either. He's out to kill, is Prince Charlie, and he's shootin' for the head!"

"You talk like a fool, calling him Prince Charlie!" said the angry judge.

"If he ain't the Prince, how can he shoot so straight?" said Bullen, with naïve simplicity.

And the others, it appeared, seemed to feel very much the same way.

Clay Livingston stood up.

"Benson," said he, "it's Dean, here, and maybe something to boot, to get back my oldest son. I'm going to trust you to arrange it, or you can trust me to raise more trouble than you ever seen in all of your born days."

And he turned and stalked with a long stride from the room.

CHAPTER XXIII.

ESCAPE.

NO lullaby was ever so soothing to a child's ear as was to me the knowledge that Dexter now had a pawn which he could play for my release. After the departure of Livingston, the judge and several of the others continued to talk about the situation and possible means of meeting it. The chief worry of the judge was that young Livingston, while he was in the power of Dexter, might be induced to talk too much, but, after his first explosion on the subject, he was careful to conceal his idea from me as much as possible.

Sometimes I was brought into the conversation, but I had very little interest in it now. Besides, I was so soundly tired that since I could afford to forget my own dangers, I sank back in my chair and was quickly asleep.

I wakened, after a time, rather chilled and stiff, and my head had been nodding so hard that the back of my neck was aching. A stiff wind was rising, and the shutters of the old house were

being banged back and forth, here and there. No doubt it was the mournful complaining and whistle of the wind, together with the clapping of the shutters, that wakened me.

I yawned two or three times, rubbed my neck, and looked about me. Every one had left the room except Bullen and one other, whose name I did not know. They were watching me with a sullen persistence, Bullen having a shotgun across his knees, and the other, a rifle against his chair, Plainly this pair had been set to guard me, a thing that would have been ridiculous—either one of them being more than enough to guard me—if it had not been that there was the danger of Dexter reaching for me from the outside of the house.

"You fellows have a dull job," I suggested to them.

Bullen shrugged his shoulders.

"You take it easy," he said. "But don't you forget—you ain't out of hot water yet, stranger. And you're likely to leave your scalp behind you when you leave!"

He was in a very ugly humor, either because of the guard duty which had fallen to him, or because of an early dislike which he had taken to me. I could afford to overlook the display of temper.

I composed myself for another nap, and gradually sank off to sleep. I wakened, a good deal later on, with a veritable thunderclap in my ears. One of the shutters of the dining room had blown wide and slammed with a huge report against the side of the house.

I heard Bullen swear.

"Go latch it again, Billy," said he.

Billy got up and stretched.

"The wind must be changing," said he. "It ain't been blowing in a direction to bother these windows, up to now."

He sauntered across the room with his hands in his pockets. He walked like a rooster, his head going back and forth on his long neck. No one could have called Billy a graceful lad, but he had a good-natured eye that pleased me a great deal more than the make-up of a man like Bullen.

"It's blowing up pretty wild," said Billy, at the window, leaning out a bit into the dark.

"Aw, close the window, and shut up, will you?" ordered Bullen.

I looked across at the youth, expecting to hear an angry retort. Instead, he started back half a step and jerked up his hands shoulder-high. The hands remained there for a moment; his whole attitude, even viewed from behind, suggested horror and astonishment. I looked past him into the black of the night which he was facing and made out, very faintly, the glimmering of a gun pointed at his heart!

THAT sight raised me out of my chair. I glanced at Bullen, and saw him covering a yawn, so I took it for granted that he had seen nothing.

For my part, I started for that window, sauntering, wondering how soon Bullen would become suspicious, for I knew, instantly, that behind that gun in the outer dark was Prince Charlie. I measured the difficulties at a glance. The window was low and wide. Such a wild cat as Charlie Dexter would have leaped through it like a circus dog through a ring. But for me, I would have to climb over the sill—and Dandy Bullen was back there in the corner, watching me, with a shotgun across his knee.

Billy, perhaps in response to a whispered order from outside, had lowered his hands at once and thrust them deeply into his pockets. There was nothing highly suspicious about the situation except that he so long delayed in securing the window.

"Where are *you* aiming to go, Dean?" asked Dandy. "He's aiming to take a

little walk out through the window, Billy," he added to his companion guard.

And Dandy laughed.

There was no answering laughter from Billy. I saw a quiver in his shoulders; otherwise, he was turned to stone as I came up beside him.

And then I saw, in the dark, the outline of Prince Charlie, and the clear, cold gleam of his steady gun as it pointed at the heart of the youth within.

"Billy!" snapped Dandy. "Mind Dean. He's right behind you. Say, what the heck is the matter with you, you blockhead?"

He was enough irritated by the continued silence and frozen stillness of Billy to jump up from his chair. That moment I selected for getting through the window.

I don't know exactly how I managed it. I only remember that it seemed to me, during that second of time, that all of my muscles had turned numb, and that I was swimming toward the outer darkness as toward a haven of safety. I was half in and half out when Dexter caught me with an amazing strength and jerked me the rest of the way into the kind dark. At the same time, Billy risked his life by leaping sidewise and shouting: "Dexter! It's Prince Charlie!"

There was a yowl from Bullen, like that of a lion dropped into a roaring fire. And the next moment a charge of buckshot crashed into the window and hissed over my head as I landed on hands and knees upon the ground.

There was a spur of infinite keenness that got me to my feet on the bound. I sprinted right down the side of the house before the man who was leading the way, then turned behind him and angled off among the trees. There I saw the loom of horses. The tethering rope I jerked free, together with the little twig to which it was secured, and then like any Wild West rider I bounded into the saddle. I think I could have jumped over the horse, for that matter—fear had made me so light and so strong.

For all my speed, I was behind Dexter, as he headed away from the house.

And behind us, I heard Dexter House wake up with a roar that boomed heavily along the strong current of the wind. Guns exploded, too, though none of the bullets came near us, and I suppose that Billy and the infuriated Dandy Bullen were firing at the swaying of the shrubs and the dark saplings in the woods, taking them for men.

Dexter pulled back beside me.

"Can you sit a jumping horse?" he shouted.

Well, I had ridden a little over the jumps, but only in an amateurish way, of course.

I answered that I would stick to the saddle, and the next minute he was firing instructions.

"Give him his head as he rises. Don't fight him, and he'll see you through all right!"

AND then a fence rose before us and looked to me as lofty as the wall of a house. The bars shot downward as the horse rose. I hung dizzily in midair, at the top of the rise, and then the ground rushed darkly up toward me. We landed. I lost a stirrup. The jolt took half my breath and all my wits, and for the next few minutes all I remember was a succession of dizzy ups and downs as we flew half a dozen fences. And then, at last, with my feet out of the stirrups, which were flying wildly, and with my body slewed far to one side, we struck the heavenly smoothness of the Monte Verde road.

My horse was nearly out of control, by this time, and Dexter helped straighten him out with a sharp order and an extra tug on the reins.

At last we sat still in the saddle in the middle of the road. The moon came out from behind a cloud and looked at

us, just then, for the wind was blowing the sky as clean and cold as steel.

"Let's get on, Dexter," I called to him. "They'll be pouring after us, in no time, and I'm no expert rider!"

I stared behind me. Every moment I expected that from the midst of some copse that was trembling and shining under the moon, a volley of terrible riders would burst out at us.

Dexter merely laughed.

"They'll wait a while to curse," said he. "And I don't think that they'll take to the saddle at all. They've had one useless chase, to-night, already. Ah, man," he went on, exultation and joy in his voice beyond my describing, "ah, Dean, now would be the time to go straight back to the house and get in among them—if I wanted to do them a mischief! But a little later, for that. Break their morale, first, and then drive 'em, some day, like sheep—like sheep!"

And he laughed once more, the mirth choking off his words.

I almost forgot my sense of peril, as I stared at that strange youth. I looked again over my shoulder, and pulled impatiently at the reins of my horse.

"Here's the road to Monte Verde, straight as a string," said he. "Ride straight down it. If you feel a little jumpy in the nerves, ride hard all the way. That gelding will take you all right. He has the legs and he has the barrel, too!"

I stared up that winding road and yearned after it so greatly that it seemed to me like the road to heaven. I could not see Monte Verde itself, but I could see the shoulder of the mountain on which the town stood.

But then, something stopped me for a moment.

I glanced aside at the youth.

"Dexter," said I, "if I leave you, it's war to the knife between you and all the men in the valley."

"Aye, it's war to the knife, anyway," he replied carelessly. "They would have it that way. They asked for it, and now they have it!"

"Well," I told him, "you may amuse yourself for a while, like a cat catching rats, but it's a diet that would soon be the end of you. If you'll let me stay with you, Dexter, I'll try to be your emissary once more, and carry terms of a new peace to them!"

He brought his horse closer to me and looked at me with his bright, steady eyes.

"Why, man," said he, "that's the offer of a true friend."

"I hope to be one to you," said I.

He put out his hand, silently, and gripped mine, and my heart leaped very oddly. Then he turned his horse off the road, and my gelding followed him, without control from my hands.

CHAPTER XXIV.

TORTURE.

I WAS still more than a little upset and anxious about our enemies, but Dexter was at ease. He pointed out that no one had been on hand to see our actual course of flight and that the others would hardly suspect us of having flown the many fences between that part of the house and the Monte Verde road. And so he led the way without any haste along a winding cow trail across the meadows of a pasture land, darkly blooming with groves and thickets here and there.

On the way, I asked him what actually had happened in the capture of Slade Livingston.

Dexter made light of that. He declared that there was nothing to it except a lucky idea that came to him when, on the verge of the wood into which he had ridden, he had looked back and seen that his pursuers were scattered, and that the four immediately behind were aiming to enter the trees behind him at various points. Then, he said, the plan came to him.

"Tell me, Dexter," said I. "When you started for that forest, you hadn't planned on turning back and trying to trap one of them?"

"Only vaguely, only vaguely," said he. "It was what I wanted to do, but, later on, the opportunity was held right under my nose. I couldn't fail to take it."

"But Slade—he's a big fellow and looks like a fighter!"

"A rope is a great subduer of energy," said Prince Charlie, chuckling. "A horse soon learns not to run against it, and what a horse learns at one lesson, you'd think that a man could learn at least as fast. But Slade Livingston had needed two. And he's getting the second one now!"

Something more than merriment came into his voice as he said this, and I asked him where Slade was. He said that he would show me presently, and then called my attention to the river below us, and the way the water darkened at the margins of the stream, and brightened in the middle.

"I'd like to be a painter," said Prince Charlie. "Night pictures would be my style, though."

He laughed again. He was bubbling with delight.

"You're happy, Dexter," said I.

"As if I had wings! As if I had wings!" said he. "After ten years, this is heaven, Dean. Smell the fresh of the grass in that wind, will you? Why, one night like this is worth an ordinary year. Tell me, Dean, how they felt in the house when they learned that Slade was with me. And what did the judge say? There's the villain, I think. The judge is the man, I'd say. What do you think, Dean?"

"The judge," I said, as judicially as I could, "is no ordinary person. There's bad in him. There may be a lot of good in him, too. I can't say, as yet, except that I'm glad that you got me out of his hands."

"I never could have done it," he said, "if you hadn't budged his gun, just as he was drawing his bead on me, this evening. He had the look of a fellow who doesn't miss a point-blank target, no matter how fast it's moving."

"How in the world could you see what I did?" I asked. "Your back was turned, and you were diving through the window, as nearly as I can remember."

"I have an eye in the back of my head," said he. "That's my great advantage, in a pinch." He began to chuckle. "It takes practice, and that's about all, Dean."

"And where's Livingston now?" I asked him.

"You want to change the subject, do you?" he remarked. "Well, you're modest, but I know what it must have cost you to interfere with the judge, at that moment!"

"No," I told him frankly. "As a matter of fact, I reached out on a sudden impulse that I wouldn't have had the courage to follow, on second thought. But where's Livingston?"

"Stretching," said this remarkable youth. "Just having a good stretch to take all the lies out of him and leave him nothing but the truth. I hate a liar, Dean."

"I don't know what you're driving at," I said.

"You'll see, in a minute," he assured me.

And I did!

HE led the way into a small copse to our left. Inside of it, the moonlight shot down pale streams of silver, and the shadows of the tree trunks were painted black against the ground. Inside of this covert, the wind was not felt, though it roared and groaned overhead, and I was feeling much more comfortable in spirit and in body, when it seemed to me that I saw a man leaping at me, with his hands stretched above his head.

I jerked back my horse so hard that the gelding reared, and then, as my mount settled forward once more, I made out what it was.

It is a thing which I still hate to think of. The picture of it sickens me now, on reflection, just as it sickened me at the time.

For there was Slade Livingston tied up by the wrists to the bough of a tree with his feet just touching the ground. That was the ingenious and terrible part of the thing. The inhuman craft of Dexter had arranged the matter so exactly, and hoisted his victim to such a nice height, that by standing on tiptoes, Slade could support all of his weight on his feet.

But have you ever tried to stand on tiptoe for any length of time? A man's weight is intended to come down through the bones of the leg, and the major part of it rests on the heel There's nothing falser than a tiptoe position, except for a dancer.

Poor Livingston was strung up there in such a way that he could put part of the burden on his legs, and part of it on his arms.

But who can hang by the arms for long? Not even those who have a good deal of ape in the make-up can do it very long, and Slade Livingston had had to endure this torment for a long time. His weight sagged straight down from the shoulders; his numb legs vainly strove to take off some of the pressure from the straining, stretching ligaments of the shoulders, but they were simply bending uselessly at the knees. He was limp from head to foot, except for his head and neck. And the neck of the youth was swollen and rigid with agony.

His mouth was open, and his expression was that of a frozen screech of protest. I wondered why the sound did not come out until, looking closer through the shadows, I saw that the jaws were distended, not by his will, but by a gag.

I have tried to describe this picture in detail, but nothing can convey the horror of its effect upon me, nor the terrible bulging eyes of the tortured man. It left me speechless.

Dexter dismounted. I think I slid down to the ground because I was unable to keep the saddle any longer.

And Dexter now was standing in front of the prisoner, and reaching up, he removed the gag.

A deep, wordless groan came from Slade.

"You've had a chance to rest your body and work your brain," said Dexter. "Will you talk freely now?"

"Yes!" came the thick-tongued, almost inaudible whisper. "Yes, yes—oh——"

And Dexter cut him down, slashing the rope in two.

He fell, literally, like a lifeless thing, a creature without volition, a being without any power. Slumping upon his side a little, he remained in a heap.

DEXTER straightened him out, and then sat him up against the trunk of a tree. He pulled out a flask and pressed it to the lips of the youngster, and Slade Livingston drank deep, groaned, and then caught his breath as though the stimulus of the whisky merely gave him a greater feeling of his own exquisite agony.

"Take a little time," said Dexter cheerfully. "You'll find that the pain grows less, after a time. Will you smoke? No, I don't suppose that you can raise your hand to your face, just now. It will be better later on. Though it may be a month or so before you can throw a saddle on your horse, Slade."

He actually stood there calmly before his victim and lighted a cigarette, and smoked it with careful appreciation. And he asked me:

"Did you ever notice, Dean, that tobacco never tastes by moonlight as it does in the sun?"

I had not spoken since we came there. I could not speak now until he said gently:

"It's about time for you to talk, Livingston."

At this, Livingston said with a groan: "I'll tell you—and God forgive me! I wish that I'd died, sooner!"

"You understand, Dean," said Dexter. "It's to be the whole history of the night ten years ago, as only a Benson or a Livingston could give it. It ought to be worth hearing, eh?"

"What I heard comes from——" began Slade Livingston, in a groaning voice which I can still both feel and hear.

But then I could stand it no longer, and the words rushed up from me.

"Dexter," said I, "I'm sorry that I ever laid eyes on your face!"

He turned suddenly toward me. He was so taken by astonishment that the cigarette actually fell from between his fingers.

"Of all the horrible things that I've ever seen, this is a great deal the most horrible!" I went on.

"I understand you," said he. "You're a decent fellow, Mr. Dean. I've seen that, of course, before to-night. But you don't realize the whole history that goes behind this. You don't see what I saw, ten years ago, and you don't stand as I stood, to watch your father being murdered. You've not been hounded by the mystery of Scorpio, and the influences behind him. You've not wanted to take your revenge in blood, as a man should, but been too much in the dark to know just where you should strike. But here's the door that will open the whole treasure of knowledge to me. D'you wonder that I wanted to open it, even in this way?"

"Dexter," I said to him, "if you're a human being and not a devil, tell me this: Did Slade Livingston have any part in what was done ten years ago?"

"No, he was only a boy, of course. So was I a boy, but they hunted me for my life!"

"Did this fellow bear a hand?"

"No."

"Then you're utterly beneath contempt if you wring from him a story that he's heard in confidence and that will affect the lives of others."

He began to stare at me. He took out a second cigarette, lighted it, and blew the smoke thoughtfully above his head, where it appeared like milk in the patterning of the moonlight.

He must have stood there for two or three minutes, like that, before he said to me: "You're right. I'm wrong. I'm entirely wrong, and I've done Livingston an injury."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE ORCHARDS.

THE grisly picture that I had looked in on was enough of a shock, but I don't think that I was so bewildered by it as I was by the sudden and free admission which Dexter made.

For I dare say that there is nothing which we hold to be more self-evident than that right is obvious, and that we are almost born with a foreknowledge of it. But the understanding of it by Dexter was such a dim thing that he had proceeded blandly on his course of action until what I said pulled him up short.

I had spoken to him without the slightest belief that he would really take my words to heart. I had felt that he must be as far beyond reclamation as any beast of prey that ever hunted after helpless creatures, but it had not needed five minutes to change his mind completely.

He had been a puzzle to me more than once before this. He was ten times more so after this strange event.

He accepted my point so completely that he merely added:

"I'm ten times thankful that I brought you along with me to-night, Dean. I don't know—it seems as though there must have been some controlling force that made me meet you in Monte Verde. About Livingston, I merely thought that——"

He did not complete the sentence. I suppose he would have said that he had merely looked upon Livingston as an enemy, and therefore one beyond the decent rights of man. Well, I had said enough—far more than I would have had the courage to say, probably, if the impulse had not mastered me in that first moment.

He turned his attention to poor young Livingston now.

The latter was so far gone that, after the interruption, he went on: "On that night, what happened was that——"

In the torment of his body and mind. he had not understood the effect of my intervention!

"Hold on," said Dexter. "You're not to talk. I've changed my mind about that. It appears that I've been a good deal of a brute, Slade. I'm sorry for that, as you can imagine. But there's to be no more out of you. If it were your father, now, that would be a very different matter, eh, Dexter?"

"Would you do the same thing to him?" I asked.

"And why not?" he cried at me. He added, suddenly: "Ah, but I understand your idea. Even when it's wild Indians we're fighting, we have to remain white men. That's your idea, isn't it?"

I told him that it was.

LIVINGSTON, now that the strain was ended, now that it suddenly appeared that all the torment had been for nothing, dropped his head back against the tree that propped him up and groaned from the depths of his heart. And my own heart bled for the boy. After all, he had merely been playing follow-the-leader when he rode with Benson or his father against Charlie Dexter.

"What will we do with him?" asked Dexter. "He can't walk—not for a day or two, I dare say. He certainly can't lift his arms for a week. We'll have to get him to his house, I suppose—and give the hornets another chance to sting us. Aye, and *they'll* have no hesitation. Moral scruples won't bother them a whit, because they're beyond being upset by mere trifles. What will we do with this hulk now?"

"Charlie," Livingston said, "if you can get me to the Orchard place, they'll take care of me and cart me home again."

"Are the Orchards still living here in the valley?" asked Dexter, evidently violently surprised.

"Aye, they're still among us."

"I thought that you would have hounded them out, long ago."

"Because they were friends of your father's?" asked Livingston. "Is that why we should have hounded them out?"

"Yes. They stood with us on that night."

"They stood with you, and the others respected them for it," said Slade.

He had mastered his pain in the most manly fashion. Perhaps the relief from the worst of the torment was helping him now.

"And they've been able to keep going?"

"They're poor as mice," said Slade. "But they keep going."

"What made them poor?" demanded Dexter. "They used to have two whole sections of fine land!"

"Of course they did," said Slade. "But—well, they lost a lot of it, I don't know just how."

"And now who has the land they lost?"

"Why, the Dinmonts and the Crowells, I think."

"I thought so," said Dexter. He went on, through his teeth: "Now, God help me to make it up to them! I'd feed them to the fish. Oh, confound them, I'd make the balance swing even for everything that the Orchards have suffered! Tell me honestly, Slade. Have they a friend in the valley?"

"Well," said Slade, "I've seen a good deal of Jenny Orchard. But they're pretty bitter, and the rest of our people don't have much to do with them. They're friends of the Laffitters. Jenny and Claudia are always going back and forth to see one another. If you can get me to the Orchard house, Charlie—it's not more than half a mile from here, I think."

Dexter had dropped on one knee before the other, not in humility, you may be sure, but in order to talk more closely with him.

"I'll tell you what," said he, "I'm going to take care of you, Slade. After you're back on your feet, you'll be after me to get square for to-night's business, and I won't blame you. But now that we're on talking terms for a moment, I want to tell you that I'm sorry about this, Slade. I can't help remembering some of the old days, before—well, I remember the fights and the races that we had together. I'd half wish we could call it square?"

And as I listened, amazed to hear this from the bitter heart of Dexter, Livingston answered:

"Do you think that I blame you much for what you did to-night? Not a bit! I might have done as badly by you. At any rate, I would have shot you down, if I had half a chance, and been glad of it! Charlie, I think that we could call the thing square, so far as I'm concerned!"

"I think you mean it," said Dexter.

"I do."

Dexter stood up

"There's something coming out of this, after all, and a sight bigger thing than I'd hoped for. Dean, will you give me a hand, and we'll try to get him onto that horse of mine."

WE managed it, though it was very difficult, for he was still hardly more than a dead, limp weight. But once we had him in the saddle, with Dexter on one side supporting him, and I on the other, and the second horse led behind us, we made good progress through the wood, and over a hill into sight of a ranch which was now very close to us.

We got into a lane through a set of bars which I lowered while Dexter held up Slade Livingston, and presently there were half a dozen dogs—mongrels all of them, I think—barking and howling about us. Slade called to them, and they seemed to recognize his voice, for they became more quiet.

Then we got to the back door of the house, just as a window screeched up and a man's voice called: "Who's there?"

"Slade Livingston," the youth answered.

"What're you doing around at this time, Slade?" asked the other. "If you're hunting for Charlie Dexter here, you're certainly barking up the wrong tree."

"I've had a fall," said Slade, "and I'm badly done up."

"Hello!" said the other. "I'll be right with you."

When we got our burden off the horse and up to the back door of the house, it was already being opened by a man who had his feet in slippers and was tightly huddling a coat over his shoulders.

He held up a lantern, and something about Livingston's face—its pallor, or the strained look about the eyes, I suppose—made him exclaim loudly:

"Why, you look like you'd been shot! Bring him in, boys. Easy, now. This way. Stretch him out here on the sofa.

Any bones broke, Slade? Wait till I call ma and Jenny!"

And he sent out a whoop that soon brought scurrying sounds through the house.

We had Livingston made as comfortable as we could, with a pillow under his head, and another drink of whisky to raise his stamina. But the moment the lantern light played over his face, I felt a distinct qualm. He looked years older. There were thick wrinkles around his eyes and the corners of his mouth, and the set frown which he wore could not be relaxed. Poor Livingston had been through something a great deal bitterer than death, in the dark of that night.

The women came, then—first little Jenny Orchard, a pretty brown-faced girl, and Mrs. Orchard, bowed with work and trouble, her calico wrapper hanging about her like the feathers around a drowned chicken. And, after these, came a taller girl who commanded one's attention with a sudden force, in spite of the dimness of the light. And this was Claudia Laffitter.

I suppose that I should have been less surprised, having in mind what Livingston had told us not long before, but it was an odd thing to see her there, when I had been picturing her so vividly back there in Monte Verde. She gave us not a glance, but suddenly she was taking charge, and the other two women were obeying her instructions.

Old Orchard drew aside with us. He was as bent and thin as his wife. His shoulders were so pulled down that he always seemed to be supporting a weight in either hand.

"I don't know you boys," said he.

"You knew me ten years ago," said Dexter.

"Hold on," said Orchard. "I knew you? Did you live around here?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"In Dexter House."

"Hey!" exclaimed Orchard, and snatching the lantern from the table, he raised it high and threw the light full into Charlie's face. His own face was a study worth reading, in the meantime. "Jumping Jehoshaphat! Ma! Jenny!" he exclaimed. "Just look here, will you?"

Dexter, smiling a little, endured the glances which were bent on him, merely nodding to them, and saying: "Hello, Mrs. Orchard. Jenny, it's a long time, isn't it?"

And Jenny was the first to speak.

"It's true!" she whispered. "It's Prince Charlie, and he's come home again!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

A DISTURBANCE.

THAT was the beginning of an evening which I shall never forget. It was one of the most impressive things that I ever have seen —the silent reverence and amazement with which the assembled family of the Orchards looked upon Charles Dexter and hailed him, straight off, as Prince Charlie. For the term was an old one in the valley, it appeared, and there had always been a Prince Charlie, of one generation or another, until that fatal night ten years before.

After that first survey of him—of course they had heard before this about his appearance in Monte Verde—they hailed him without any reservation, and I think that this acclaim of theirs sufficed to remove from my mind the last lingering doubts that I entertained about him.

The last? No, I cannot say the last. Throughout, I had in my mind a hazy incredulity, for the young man seemed something less or something more than real, like an actor on a stage, permitted or trained to surpass the normal expectancy.

But on this night, he was to show

himself in a light such as I never had seen fall upon him.

I had seen him grave, austere, with something the manner of a cat watching a mouse, and prepared to whirl on a secret enemy that might be stalking from behind. I had seen him hysterically joyous over the sense of danger and of action as he entered into Dexter Valley after that long, ten-year absence.

But now he was like a child in a family—a favored child, let me say, conscious of his position in the affections of all around him, and returning their affection tenfold. It might be acting, I thought, but certainly it was charming.

There seemed no malice and no bitterness in him.

For instance, when old Orchard drew him aside and, in whispering, strove to pitch his voice so that I might not hear, Dexter reached out and pulled me by the coat sleeve close up to them.

He said, with the happiest of smiles: "This is the best friend I have in the world, though he isn't my oldest. This is the man who has done more for me than any other man. I tell you, I'd be dead and underground by this time, or spinning down the river for the fishes, if it hadn't been for him."

Orchard, of course, looked at me with new eyes, and he said: "I wasn't tryin' to talk behind the back of Mr. Dean. I just wanted to know, Charlie, the right truth of what happened between you and this here Slade Livingston boy?"

"Nothing happened between us," said Dexter, looking Orchard dauntlessly in the eye. "Not a thing. He simply had a bad fall from his horse."

"Livingstons ain't the kind that fall off horses," declared Orchard unabashed by the straight eye of the young man.

"This Livingston took a fall, however," persisted Charlie. "And now, let's forget about it, shall we?"

Orchard, reluctantly, gave over the subject. It had worried him, plainly. No matter how much he detested the other men of the valley, because of the wrongs which he had endured from them, Slade Livingston obviously had a place in his affections. Perhaps Jenny was the key with which Slade had opened the grim old farmer's heart.

IN the meantime, however, Jenny had surrendered the care of the injured man to Claudia Laffitter and had hurried out into the kitchen with her mother, where they were bustling about to arrange for some food.

God bless the hospitable heart of the West, which opens its pantry almost as soon as it opens its door! Go where you will, you will not find surly lip service or a grudging look, no matter how poor a family is your host. So I have always found it, and so I think it must always remain, until the priceless sense of a frontier departs from it under the pressure of multitudes who fill its mountains and its deserts. Even then, perhaps, the old idea and the old ideal will survive. At least, that is my hope.

Claudia made a capable nurse.

She wound a cold, wet towel across the face and the eyes of Livingston, and she put a soothing salve over the abrasions made by the rope around his wrists. The bruised and strained muscles and the drawn ligaments about his shoulders, she massaged.

Her touch, at first, made him grind his teeth at the fresh agony which he was enduring, but presently her skillful manipulation was bringing the blood back, to heal overwearied muscles and to restore tortured nerves.

There is no time for a massage like the earliest moment after a strain, and I suppose that work of the girl's was almost a life-saver for Slade Livingston. Presently, we heard a groan of relief from him.

"You must have hit a rope when you got that fall," said Claudia to him. "These are rope burns on your wrists, I take it."

"I got both my hands twisted in the tie rope, like a fool," he replied.

"And yet your clothes don't look as if——"

She stopped herself when she was on the point, I suppose, of saying that his clothes did not show that he had been dragged. But, a moment later, she cast over her shoulder, toward Charles Dexter, a most expressive glance.

I thought that poor Livingston would try to keep the secret, but when she had taken the towel from about his eyes, and was massaging, now, with her strong fingers, the aching back of his neck, and the thick, deep muscles at the base of it, he looked straight up into her face and waited for her eye.

When he caught it, I heard him say, distinctly:

"It was Charlie who did it, Claudia. And he had plenty of cause. And I'm not on his trail, either. I'm not even trying to get back at him, no matter what the rest of the people around here may say of him. Now you know, and you can talk as much as you like about it."

She laughed, very softly.

"I wouldn't talk about it for a million dollars," she said. "Not even to Jenny or her father. Slade, I always said that you were the only *man* in the valley!"

She was enormously pleased with the youth, and so was I; and Dexter turned a bright red with satisfaction. I never before had seen him so affected.

Then the meal came in, and of course you can imagine what it was like. It was actually better than most, because the Orchards kept chickens. It is nearly always a sign of a poor rancher or farmer when there are plenty of chickens cackling about the house and barnyard.

But at least the Orchards had eggs, and we got them now, fried, and big, thick strips of bacon, fried Western fashion. That is to say, some of the rankness of the fat remains, and the inside of a specially thick slice may retain a bit of the gristly effect of raw meat. However, for a very hungry man there is nothing in the world to compare with it as a food.

Besides these main dishes, we had slices of new-made bread, cut thick because the loaf was so soft that the pieces cut out of shape. And we ate this bread with pale but sweet butter, newly worked and fresh as daisies, and an apricot marmalade with the flavor of peach pits and some of the pits themselves in it.

This meal may not sound sumptuous in recital, but since I had eaten supper at the house of the judge, I had been through a good deal, and I, for one, can bear witness that troubles of the spirit are worse than mountain climbing for giving an appetite. All through, and at the end, we had quantities of black coffee.

THERE was only one unusual feature at this table, and that was conversation. It was supplied by a chorus, and Prince Charlie.

The chorus was composed of Jenny Orchard and her father and mother—and a few groaning comments from poor Slade Livingston, who had recovered the use of his hands so wonderfully that, though they trembled a good deal, by managing the coffee cup with both at once, he could bring it up to chatter against his teeth while he took a gulp. I was glad to see that lad recovering so fast. He and the three Orchards kept up a running fire of chatter with Prince Charlie as the victim.

I said nothing. Neither did Claudia. But she was pale with interest, and sat up like a drum major, looking from face to face to see how the story was

affecting the various people at the table. Once, when her glance fell upon me, I smiled straight back at her, and she understood so well that she dared not meet my eye again during the entire course of the evening.

They wanted to know everything. And Prince Charlie told them—how he was taken away from Dexter Valley that fatal night ten years before, and how Philip Anson had been like a father to him, and how he had finally returned with Anson, when the latter decided that he might be man enough for the rôle that awaited him, and how his one hope was to avenge his father by killing Manly Crowell, and the massacre of the other members of his family by finding and destroying Scorpio, if that arch-devil really still lived.

How they listened to this talk! How their eyes started! How their eyes shone!

"And before the end," said Prince Charlie, "I'm going to get back some of what belongs to my family. And when I get back what is mine, you can be sure that you'll get back what is yours, or else my name is not Dexter!"

Well, he did not need to make promises to any Orchard.

I had a very odd feeling, while I was in that house, watching their attitude toward Dexter. It was as though he were, really, a sort of crown prince, and all their affection and loyalty were naturally due to him as a powerful debt. They did not act foolishly, but with a quiet, deep devotion. There must have been a certain quality in the Dexters of the past, I decided, or else they never could have induced free-born Westerners to have such an attitude toward them.

There was only one disturbance, during the course of the evening. That was when the wind, which was still rather high, happened to blow open a shutter.

Dexter got up at once, raised the window, and closed and latched the shutter.

"You did that pretty fast," said Orchard. "You'd almost think that the Crowells and the Dinmonts and the Bensons, and the rest, was all outside of there, ready to jump in on you."

And Prince Charlie made an answer that took my breath.

"Oh, they're out there," he said cheerfully. "They've been there for some time. But they know that I'm not alone in here!"

The current of general gladness was stopped in mid-course, though Dexter exclaimed that everything was all right, that there was no danger to any one, so long as Slade remained with them, and that not a hair of any one's head, including his own, would be harmed.

Jenny Orchard sprang up from the table and ran across the room to the man on the sofa, and stood above him with her fists clenched.

"Slade!" she cried out. "If anything happens to Prince Charlie—I'll never speak to you again!"

And, from the look on Slade's face, I knew that it was a threat sufficient to make him a very miserable lad. But none of the rest of us smiled. We looked at Prince Charlie, and only old Orchard moved from his chair. It was to get his long rifle that hung on two nails against the wall.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE PACK.

FOR the first time, I noticed an old grandfather's clock in a corner of the room. It had a long, straight shank of a body and a face as round as the head of an owl, and now that face seemed to be watching us imperturbably, while the clicking of the machinery became audible through the room like a faint strumming upon musical strings. My heart, you may be sure, was running far faster than the ticking of the clock.

Claudia Laffitter spoke first.

"What makes you think that they're outside?" she asked.

"Oh, because this place is so close to the place where I took Livingston, here, and by this time they're sure to have found that spot."

"Then why did you stay here?" she exclaimed impatiently.

I think every one had the same thought, for all heads turned to Dexter, and all attention remained fixed on him.

"Because," said he, with consummate calmness, "the only witness I have that the valley men have been hunting for my life is Mr. Dean, here. And if he's snuffed out along with me, then there would be no one to testify that I ever was down here. Now, however, there's the whole Orchard family, and you'll presently have a chance to see what's waiting outside. Will you stand back from the door?"

We scattered to each side, watching him like school children. He slipped out of his coat and draped it over the foot of a mop, put his high-crowned sombrero above this, and throwing the door wide open, he presented this ridiculous dummy to the outer night, at the same time calling out: "Good night, every one!"

How could any one be deceived by such a foolish imitation? That thought had barely formed in my mind when half a dozen rifles exploded, and the coat was blown streaming in from the top of the mop, like a flag from its pole. At the same time, with the roar of the guns, there was a hum of bullets, and the crashing of them against the inner wall of the room.

Prince Charlie, laughing a little, slammed the door and locked it.

"All meant for me!" said he, and pointed to the coat.

It was riddled with holes! Every one of the six bullets which we found afterward had bored into the wall inside the house had, in the first place, whipped through the coat of Dexter. It was very good shooting. It was shooting so good that it must have blown him instantly into kingdom come, if he had been inside that coat.

"Yep," said old Orchard, nodding his head. "They couldn't wait—them starved coyotes. They ain't had any raw meat for a long time!"

Without any exception, every soul in that room was calm. I could hardly imagine it. For my part, I was mastering the jumping of my nerves with the greatest effort, but the rest of them were as cool as you please.

Old Mrs. Orchard, I thought, would surely either faint or scream. But not a bit of it! She went and poked the tip of her finger into each of the bullet holes which had already been made in the wall.

"Neater than an auger would've done it," she said, and smiled and nodded to us.

She was a grand old woman, and though time had bent her back, it had not touched her spirit.

Little Jenny Orchard, too, said merely: "We'll have to putty them up. Aren't they a pack of fools to shoot at a dummy like that?"

"I tell you how it be," commented Orchard, rubbing his chin in a contented way. "Your finger gets jumpy on the trigger, when you're hunting big game. The bigger the game, the jumpier the finger. No wonder they was overanxious to shoot, when it comes to that!"

"It's a dastardly, contemptible thing," said poor Slade Livingston. He got himself up on the sofa on his trembling elbows and exclaimed again: "If I've got a father or a brother out there——"

"Hold on," said Dexter. "Don't say anything you may trip over later on. I know that it's religion down here in the valley to get rid of me. I don't blame them. They've got so much money at stake that it stops being murder and becomes a war, from their point of view."

JENNY ORCHARD clasped her hands together and looked at Dexter with worshiping eyes. "I wish that they could hear him talk. I just wish that everybody in the world could hear him talk and *then* doubt that he's Prince Charlie!"

"Well, lad," said Orchard after a moment, "we know that you've been fired on in the night. It makes out a pretty good case, all things considered, agin' *some* people in this valley; but it don't point no finger at no particular one."

"It will, though, before long," said Dexter. "They have a good many young boys, out there, and they're apt to do something foolish, before long—such as shouting a few taunts, or some such thing. I dare say that some of you could recognize the voices?"

As he spoke of the youths, I stared at him; he was hardly more than a boy himself. And yet there was an age in him which was greater than years. He did not seem at all absurd, or talking down.

"We'll find out something about them *now!*" said Claudia Laffitter.

She was at the door as she spoke, and turning the key in the lock, she now jerked it open, as young Dexter had done before, and stood there in her own person, with the lamplight shining upon her! What a target, for marksmen who apparently did not look twice before they fired.

All our tongues were frozen in our throats, except for Dexter. He gave out a terrible, husky cry of "Claudia!" and started for her. But she, with a smile at him over her shoulder, walked straight out into the dark.

I doubled up my hands so that the nails wounded the palms, but there was no crash of musketry to greet her. Hasty as those marksmen were, perhaps they had learned a lesson by the first trick that had drawn their fire.

At any rate, there was Claudia glimmering almost out of sight, for the light of the lamp followed her only dimly. And there was Dexter inside the house, showing more emotion than I ever had seen in him before. He had lost all color. His eyes were as big as a surprised child's when he turned and stared at us.

"What will they do to her? What will they dare to do?"

"Now, you hold on, Charlie," said old Orchard. "You gotta remember that this here is the West. They ain't a thug in all of Dexter Valley that would dare to put a hand on her!" He went on familiarly: "What is it, Charlie? Just general principles, sort of, or are you kind of fond of Claudia?"

Dexter did not answer. He was breathing hard, and passing a handkerchief across his forehead.

Then we could see where Claudia had paused on the outer rim of the light from the house. She was barely distinguishable, standing there. On the whole, I never have seen a woman do a thing so rash, so utterly fearless. And suddenly it illumined the character of the girl for me. There was neither fear nor evil in her, I felt.

Old Orchard, looking out after her, said suddenly: "Ah, she's the pure quill!"

And she was, of course. That was the right word for her.

"She's twenty-four carat and a yard wide," said Livingston. "There's nobody like Claudia Laffitter!"

At this, Jenny gave him rather a hard look, but Livingston was too excited to pay any heed to her.

We were not at such a distance that we could fail to hear what happened now.

The voice of the girl suddenly came back to us rather faintly, strong though it was.

"Who's out here? What cowards are out here, shooting at people in the door of this house? I'm Claudia Laffitter asking!"

I THOUGHT that no one would answer. Certainly it appeared an obvious folly to identify oneself as part of a gang of incipient murderers, but almost instantly a familiarly deep voice said in answer—and we heard the words clearly:

"A pack of young fools did that shooting at a hat and coat, Claudia. It didn't mean anything!"

"Didn't it?" she demanded, in scornful anger. "It would have meant a dead man, if Charlie Dexter had been inside that coat!"

"Look here, Claudia," said the voice of Judge Benson in reply. "We don't mean any harm to you or the Orchards, of course. But we have an idea that Slade Livingston is in that house along with Dexter."

"He is," said the girl. "And what of it?"

"Well, we want to know what shape Slade is in."

"Come in and see for yourself."

"Come in there, with that wild cat of a Dexter standing around handy?" echoed the judge.

"Come in and bring your best man with you," said the girl harshly. "There's only two men in there. You know that Mr. Orchard won't attack you unless you attack him or his friends. As for Charlie Dexter—you are not afraid of him, are you? Are two of you afraid of him?"

Her voice rose and rang. Plainly, she was glorying like a young Indian in this chance to taunt the judge. But we heard his voice smoothly answering:

"I only want to know if Slade is badly used up."

"Well, he's not. *Dexter* is no murderer!"

What Dexter's enemies might be, she left easily to be inferred. Imagine the courage and the spunk of that girl, with such a band as the valley men around her! But she did not wince.

"I'm glad to hear it," said the judge.

"And so am I!" exclaimed another man.

I recognized Livingston's voice plainly.

"Now we can write down two of them. We could swear to two of 'em," said Orchard. "Maybe it wouldn't be enough testimony to jail 'em, but it would be enough to take away all the reputation that they ever had. This won't be no country for them to live in, no longer!"

The judge went on:

"We want to disturb nobody in that house, Claudia. I have a friendly feeling for Orchard——"

"You ought to," snapped that terrible girl, "because you've eaten half of him."

I saw Orchard grin widely. Mrs. Orchard grew red with the memory of the old wrongs.

"All that we want," said the judge, "is for Orchard to forbid his house to Dexter. That's all I want."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

BENSON'S OFFER.

AT this, Dexter suddenly turned with raised brows toward the host, but Orchard, smiling sardonically, merely stared blankly at the floor.

"That's all you want?" we heard the girl answer. "You only want him to turn out his house guest, who happens to be a Dexter?"

"He's no more of a Dexter than I am," said the judge. "Don't be foolish and sentimental, Claudia. You have better sense than that, if you'll use it! You can tell Orchard from me that there'll be something for him to gain by it."

"Why, what will he gain, except a black name?"

"He'll gain that southwest two hundred and forty that he lost eight year back. That's what he'll gain, for one thing."

"If he'll turn out Dexter to be murdered by you and your men?"

"Who's talking about murder?" said Benson. "Don't be so foolish, my dear Claudia. You ought to know me better. We want to apprehend that young man, because he's dangerous."

"Yes," said Claudia. "I guessed that was why you wanted him. You wouldn't apprehend him with a bullet, I suppose?"

"Certainly not. A formal arrest would——"

"Have you a warrant?"

"You know that in this part of the world one can't stick on formalities, Claudia."

"I know you can't," said the girl. "My father was murdered by you and your men—and there were no formalities then! There was no formality about that, either. I can understand why you detest formality, judge!"

"In the meantime," said he, "I fear that we're getting nowhere."

"I fear that we're not," she said. "I've only found out that you and Clay Livingston are in this gang. If that's not attempted murder——"

"My dear girl—my dear child," said he. "When I've come out expressly to bring peace to the valley and to pacify some of the wild youngsters who——" He checked himself and added: "I'll have a talk to Orchard direct."

Claudia turned and came slowly back toward the house, her head half turned to listen more carefully to the talk between Orchard and the judge.

"Orchard!" called the judge.

"Well, judge?" inquired Orchard.

"I'm coming up there to talk to you, Orchard, if you'll give me a safe conduct."

"I wouldn't trust a safe conduct from you," declared Orchard. "But if you want to trust me, you're free to."

"I'd trust you to the end of the world," said the judge, "because I know that you're an honest man."

"Do you hear that, Lizzie?" said Orchard to his wife.

She grew a brighter red than before. She threw back her shoulders and stood up straight, and the next moment Claudia stepped through the front door, and the judge behind her. Orchard had simply looked at Dexter, and Dexter had nodded his permission.

"Well, well, well!" said the judge as he came inside. "It's a long time since I've seen you folks. How are you, Lizzie?"

He held out his hand. The little old woman simply looked at him earnestly, almost wonderingly, in the face, and kept her own hands folded together before her.

The judge changed face; his smile went out in a mass of wrinkles. I felt almost sorry for him, seeing him so outfaced by the silence of one bent old woman. But, as I was saying, she stood straighter, now, and her flush had taken away some of her years. I could see, dimly, what she must have been in her youth and, also, I could guess what weighted the scales so heavily against the judge. You may be sure that he did not speak any longer with Mrs. Elizabeth Orchard. Instead, he at once gave his attention to the others in the room, though he did not offer his hand to any of them.

One lesson in that direction had been enough for him.

I WAS amused and seriously interested to see the behavior of this man. He maintained his dignity unshaken from first to last, and I could see that there was little in the world that could embarrass Judge Benson, if he were making his point.

First, as in nature bound, he went across the room to the sofa where Slade Livingston was lying and dropped a hand on his shoulder, as he leaned over the youth.

"My poor lad!" he exclaimed. "It

makes my heart ache to see you here, Slade. My heart really aches for you, and your father has been half dead with anxiety!"

Slade, in the meantime, looked up at the judge with a puckered brow. Finally he said:

"If it hadn't been for you and my father, I wouldn't be lying here. I wouldn't have turned myself into a man hunter in the first place, and I wouldn't have been made a fool of, in the second place."

The judge, with wonderful calmness, skipped over the first part of that speech and asked: "My poor lad, what happened to you? What laid you out?"

"Bad advice!" said Slade Livingston firmly.

I was amazed and delighted by his attitude.

"As for what happened, it's between Charlie Dexter and myself," said Slade.

The judge turned purple, and swinging about on his heel, he confronted Dexter silently.

"Slade had a fall," said Dexter, and he looked the judge straight in the eye.

Nothing was to be gained from him.

The baffled judge, repulsed on two fronts, now gave his attention to old Orchard himself.

"I'm sorry," said he, "to see that you're giving shelter to malefactors, and men wanted by the law!"

"What law?" asked Orchard, drawling out the words in his usual tone.

"The law," said the judge pompously, "which forbids men to break into the houses of others by stealth and by force! The law which forbids burglary!"

And he extended his big arm and pointed solemnly at Dexter.

"Tut-tut-tut," clucked Orchard. "You been and robbed the judge, Charlie?"

"Yes," admitted Dexter, to my bewilderment.

"Whacha take from him?" asked Orchard.

"A little of his time," said Dexter.

And suddenly we all laughed. We had to. It was anything to break the tension of the moment.

"What else?" asked Orchard.

"You'd better ask him," said Dexter. "What was it that I stole, judge?"

LIKE a pouter pigeon, the throat of the judge puffed and swelled with his passion, but he said nothing. And then I saw the point. No wonder that Prince Charlie agreed that he had stolen. For was the judge to admit that he attached such importance to the missing picture? Plainly we could infer that, after the visit of the young man, Benson had guessed why he had come to the house and risked such danger. It was to gain the most convincing proof of his parentage that could be found.

"It's not the matter of the stealing that counts for so much," said the judge, "but those who break into private dwelling houses——"

"Which really belong to those who break in?" suggested Dexter, with his faint, polite smile. And he gave the judge one of his little bows, something like a fencer who has scored a touch.

It certainly was a touch against the judge, in this instance. He gave the rest of his attention, point-blank, to Orchard.

"Now, Orchard," he said briskly, "things have been running down hill with you for some time. I've been sorry to see it. Very sorry. I give you an easy choice, if you're a man of sense. Get this young rascal out of your house. You've already heard him admit burglary! Get him out of your house, and you'll be rewarded. You understand? Rewarded greatly!"

"You said something about the southwest two hundred and forty, didn't you?" remarked Orchard.

My heart sank into my boots. Hunger was in the face of the old rancher —land hunger, I supposed.

"I did!" exclaimed Benson instantly. "Every acre of it will go back to you. I'll arrange that. I'll give you my word for it."

"It's a mighty lot of land," said Orchard. "But I'd have to get my wife's opinion, judge."

"Get any opinion you want," said the judge. "But you ought to be able to see your own way clearly enough, if you have eyes in your head."

"It ain't only my way that counts," said Orchard. "I've had my hard times, in the last ten years, but it's Lizzie that has cooked and sewed and milked cows, and made butter and kept up the kitchen garden, and scrubbed, and laundered and ironed. Her and her girl. They got callouses on their hands, and I reckon that they got a right to answer up for me as much as me to answer up for myself. So I'll just ask her. Lizzie, the judge is offering us two hundred and forty acres."

"I heard him," said Lizzie Orchard quietly, her eyes never leaving the face of the judge as she answered her husband.

"It's more than land that he's offering," went on Orchard deliberately. "He's offering you a chance to dress up Jenny, fine and slick——"

"Daddy!" burst out the girl.

"You shut up, Jenny," said her father. "I'm talking to your mother. You can get up Jenny to look like the little lady that she was born to be. You can get in plenty of servants. You can set back and rest yourself the rest of your life, and let the vegetables go hang, and just potter around the flower garden, that you hanker after and always have.

"You can have a neat span of hosses and drive to town Sunday morning in a rubber-tired rig, all painted and polished up fine. You can have good, decent clothes, and time to read a paper and a book. That's what the judge is offering, Lizzie, if we'll only consent to turn this boy out of the house—this boy that says he's a Dexter, and we don't know!"

It was a pretty moving argument. The eyes of Mrs. Orchard, however, dwelt as steadily upon the face of the judge as though the words were coming from him.

And the judge nodded, to give emphasis to everything which Orchard was saying.

Finally she said: "There's never been nothing on our hands that soap and water wouldn't take off. I reckon that we'd better keep them that way!"

And I knew that the judge was answered!

What will Judge Benson attempt now? You will find out in next week's issue of Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine.

DANGEROUS INDIAN BLANKETS

TOMAHAWKS and poison arrows were not the only weapons used by the redskins in their fight against the encroachment of their white enemy. Often cattlemen of the West had to cope with braves wielding nothing more deadly than Indian blankets. This happened when cowmen of the North, who found that they could buy cattle cheaply in the lower country near the Rio Grande, attempted to drive their herds home. Indians would then bear down upon them, riding swiftly, waving gay blankets over their heads, which frightened the cattle into stampedes that frequently resulted in the loss of most of the herd.

COWARD'S COURSE

By ADOLPH BENNAUER

Author of "The Pigeon Message," etc.

THROUGH the dusty window of his little office, Sheriff Bill Langtry gazed out upon the main street of Jubilee. His blue eyes, hard as cold-rolled steel at times, were beaming softly now. At intervals he glanced at a small diamond ring in his hand, watching the stone sparkle in the rays of the late-afternoon sun. Each time his eyes would light up expectantly. On the morrow, Providence willing, he meant to slip that ring on the finger of Bessie Slater, the little blond waitress at the Elite Café, and make her his prisoner for life.

Eight years in office and Bill Langtry was about to resign! Not because of age or physical unfitness, for he was only thirty-eight, but because he knew there was no future to a sheriff's job, and a girl like Bessie Slater was deserving of the best. Fortunately, he would be able to give her this. With his earnings, he had purchased a small cattle ranch a few miles north of Jubilee, which, under proper management, should expand rapidly. In a few years he hoped to be financially independent and the happiest man in New Mexico.

"An' the luckiest," he conceded humbly. "It's a mystery how Bessie

could fall for a dud like me! But I'll make myself worthy o' her, just as I've made myself worthy o' society! It ain't what a man has been that counts! It's what——"

He glanced up with a start as a figure darkened the doorway, then nodded genially when he recognized the visitor as Dick Slater, his young deputy and the brother of his fiancée, who was to be sworn in as his successor when he resigned on the following week. Slater was tall and well-knit, with clean-cut features, an aggressive jaw, and an intelligent-looking pair of dark eyes. Just now he was carrying something beneath his arm that aroused the sheriff's curiosity.

"What's that?" he demanded mischievously. "Looks like some kind of a book! Been takin' a correspondence course in sheriffin' to fit yourself for your new job?"

Slater grinned and placed the article upon the desk.

"Not exactly! But I'm aimin' to keep step with the times. That ain't a book! It's a photo album, a sort of rogues' gallery, you know, an' I'm goin' to fill it with the pictures of all the outlaws who ever operated in this part o' the State!"

BILL LANGTRY arose, his features suddenly sobering, and inspected the volume closely. It contained the pictures of more than a score of outlaws, apprehended at different times and places, most of whom were unknown to him. When he glanced back at his deputy his blue eyes held a challenging light.

"What's the big idea? These men have all served their time or been pardoned! You ain't got anything on 'em now!"

Young Slater did not catch the significance of that glance.

"Can't always tell," he explained glibly. "I believe that old theory, 'once a criminal, always a criminal,' is the only safe one for a sheriff to follow. It don't do any harm, an' it might do a whole lot o' good in case any o' these hombres decided to cut loose again! I've got 'em all here except one—that gent they called the Malapi Kid, that operated around Albuquerque about twelve or fifteen years ago. But his picture is in the State penitentiary at Magdalena an' I can get a copy, easy! What do you think o' the scheme?"

Langtry did not answer him at once. For a moment his emotions appeared to have overwhelmed him. Gripping the edge of his desk, he made a desperate attempt to control himself.

"What do I think of it?" he snapped. "I think it's the craziest plan I ever heard of! It might be all right for them cities back East, but we ain't got any use for it out here! We believe in the code that gives a man another chance! Take that Malapi Kid, for instance! Whatever crimes he might have been guilty of in the past—gun fightin', banditry or cattle rustlin'—he's paid the full penalty for 'em, an' neither you nor any other guy has any right to hound him fu'ther! I doubt very much whether the authorities at Magdalena would send you his picture on such grounds as that. They'd probably throw your letter into the wastebasket!"

Plainly, young Slater had expected anything but this. His features revealed both surprise and embarrassment, not untinged with a certain guilt. But he met Langtry's gaze squarely.

"Gosh, chief, I never thought you'd look at it like that! Mebbe you're right an' I'm wrong, but the authorities at Magdalena don't seem to think so! Yuh see, I've already written to 'em about the Kid's picture an' I got an answer from 'em, day before yesterday, sayin' they was havin' a copy made an' would send it out the next day. If they did, that means it'll reach Jubilee this evenin', on the eight o'clock stage."

HIS face turning suddenly ashen, Langtry dropped into his chair. Beneath one of his outstretched hands lay a bill from the livery stable with his check attached. Mechanically, he caught it up and thrust it toward his deputy.

"Run along an' pay that, will you?" he requested huskily. "We'll take up this other matter again when you get back!"

If he caught the puzzled look in young Slater's eyes he gave no sign. He seemed unconscious of the fact that his deputy had left. For many minutes he sat there, motionless, staring blankly at the opposite wall. So the secret of the "Malapi Kid" was to be revealed at last! That other self, whom he had considered dead and buried these fifteen years, was to live again—come back and mock him on the eve of his greatest happiness—ruin everything! For he could not expect Bessie Slater, thoroughbred though she was, to marry a man who had served five years in the State penitentiary!

If some one other than his deputy had been to blame, it might not have mattered so much. But the thought that it was the girl's brother who was responsible for his predicament was maddening. No hope of avoiding the issue now! She would be the first one that the meddlesome young fool would tell, and Langtry would have preferred to face death rather than her revulsion. Desperate, he thought of flight. But, no! That was too cowardly and would avail him nothing. At the same time he could not sit there idle. Something must be done and quickly! The only chance that seemed left to him was to go to the girl and tell her the story, himself!

"Mebbe that's the best way, after all," he reflected grimly. "Mebbe I can explain things to her so she'll understand! If she does, it don't matter a tinker's dam what her brother an' the rest of 'em think! If she don't—well, I won't be any worse off than I am now!"

Before that impulse had time to cool he caught up his hat and started outside. The Elite Café, where Bessie Slater worked, lay half a block south of his office, on the opposite side of the street. But he was not rash enough to enter it blindly. He continued down his side of the street until he came abreast of the establishment, then stopped and inspected it closely. He saw, not altogether to his relief, that it held no patrons. But Bessie, herself, attired in her neat white apron, was plainly visible, arranging some cakes and pies in the window. For a moment Langtry stood irresolute, hands trembling, the perspiration oozing from his forehead. Then, pulling himself together, he started forward to perform the bravest act of his life.

So much for his intentions! But, once more, fate intervened to block them. Scarcely had he taken the first step when from behind him sounded a muffled report. That it was the report of a six-gun, there could be no question, and that it came from the interior of the Yellow Front Saloon was equally certain. Whirling instantly, Langtry saw the little wicker doors of the establishment thrust open and two or three frightened patrons burst forth. The spectacle affected him like magic. Gone, now, was all thought of self! In that instant he ceased to be Bill Langtry and became once more the alert-minded sheriff of Jubilee. Before the little doors had stopped swinging he had passed through them.

OMINOUS quiet now pervaded that gloomy interior. His first sweeping glance showed him only two men. One of these was the bartender, standing back against the wall, wiping rag in hand, apparently too frightened to move. The other was a small, ratlike fellow, who, flourishing a

smoking six-gun, was pacing up and down in front of the bar, his teeth bared, his tiny black eyes ablaze with hate. As he paced, his voice was lifted in snarling invective against a third person, obviously hidden behind the bar.

"Come out o' that, you blankety-blanked swine! Come out an' take your medicine! If you don't, so help me, I'll shoot plumb through——"

The voice of Sheriff Langtry cut him short.

"Drop that gun, Ratty Devine! Drop it, I say! Now, put up your hands an' back away from there! Bartender, tell that other coyote that he can come out now—with his hands in the air!"

There was no need for the bartender to deliver that message. Already, a pair of hands was appearing above the bar, followed by a face almost as evil-looking as "Ratty" Devine's, a face which Langtry had no difficulty in recognizing as that of "Jerky" Coleman, another of the bad element of Jubilee. Having retrieved the guns of both men, he backed them off into separate corners, while he heard from the bartender the story of the trouble—the age-old story of a game of cards, a bad loser and an accusation of cheating. It was Jerky Coleman who had made the accusation, but it was Ratty Devine who had fired the shot.

Langtry's decision came quickly.

"You can go home, Jerky," he stated curtly. "I ain't got any charge to hold you on, but I'm keepin' your gun for a day or so. Ratty, you're comin' along with me! Six days on bread an' water, I figger, is the best way to bring that blood pressure o' yours down to normal!"

Neither man argued, for the sheriff's decisions were always final, but the glances they exchanged at parting proclaimed that their quarrel was not yet ended. If Langtry understood, he did not seem to care. His interest was not in his prisoner as he escorted him outside, but upon the little restaurant across the street, which was just beginning to fill with patrons for the evening meal. His one chance of seeing Bessie Slater before the arrival of the stage was now gone! Perhaps it was just as well, he reflected bitterly. His meeting with Coleman and Devine had changed his viewpoint in the matter. If he had felt disgust and resentment toward those would-be gunmen, how would a refined girl like Bessie feel toward such a notorious character as the Malapi Kid?

A few minutes later he was back in his office, in the rear of which stood the little adobe jail. Up to this point, Ratty Devine had kept silent, his attitude one of expectant waiting. He had made many such trips with Sheriff Langtry in the past, and on most of them, after a severe tongue lashing, he had been permitted to depart. But when he saw Langtry reaching for the keys to the calaboose he knew that he was not to get off so easily now. Where one man might have faced the situation stoically, or another with bravado, he resorted to that which had given him his nickname—a ratlike whine.

"Have a heart, Langtry," he pleaded. "I ain't done nothin' wrong! I could 'a' shot Jerky, easy as not, but I just wanted to scare him! If yuh put me in there on bread an' water for a week, it'll kill me! I ain't been strong since I had the flu, an'——"

"If you die, I'll see that you're given a Christian burial," Langtry cut in harshly, "an' your removal will make it that much easier for the next sheriff! It ain't alone this quarrel with Jerky Coleman I'm holdin' against you, Ratty. It's a combination of scrapes you've been gettin' into for the past month! So, come along, now, an' shut your trap!"

But Ratty caught the edge of the desk and clung there, his eyes glowing with a crafty light.

"Wait a minute, sheriff! I ain't

through yet! If I was to give yuh the biggest tip yuh've had in years would yuh consider lettin' me go?"

Langtry turned and surveyed him coldly, but the instinct of his profession was strong.

"I might—if the tip was big enough! Who you aimin' to squeal on, now?"

His prisoner darted a quick glance through the doorway, then nodded toward a placard that hung on the wall.

"Wolf Yager, sheriff! I know where he's at!"

LANGTRY'S pretended indifference vanished. If there were one outlaw whom he desired to meet more than any other just then, it was "Wolf" Yager. Working sometimes alone, sometimes with his gang, he had been responsible for more stage holdups and bank robberies than any other bandit in southern New Mexico; a standing reward of one thousand dollars had been offered for his capture, dead or alive. But it had been several months since he had operated in the vicinity of Jubilee, and the general impression was that he was now safely across the international border. Langtry could hardly believe that he would be rash enough to return.

"You mean, he's somewhere around here?" he demanded sharply. "Where? How'd you get your information?"

Ratty glanced through the doorway again and dropped his voice to a whisper.

"I ain't sayin' how I know, but he's hidin' out in the Sycamore hills, about twenty miles north o' here, waitin' for a chance to crack the express office at Terrapin Flats!"

For a long moment Langtry studied his face, searched those shifty black eyes. If Ratty were telling the truth, it was his duty to telephone the news of Wolf Yager's whereabouts to the sheriff of Terrapin Flats immediately, since that town lay outside his own county. But it was not of the bandit, alone, that he was thinking. He was thinking, also, of the stage that was to pass through Terrapin Flats that evening, of the fateful picture it was bringing to Jubilee, of the cringing culprit who stood before him. Innocent enough in themselves, how dangerous these thoughts became when combined! Out of them, Langtry glimpsed a plan. A plan which might have sounded like madness, perhaps, but which offered his only salvation.

Closing the door quickly, he returned to his prisoner and regarded him with eyes of metallic hardness.

"So you want me to let you go, eh! Mebbe I will, Ratty, but it's got to be for a bigger price than that! Along with your other crimes, did you ever hold up a stage?"

Ratty blinked at him, almost inarticulate with fright and indignation.

"Me—hold up a stage? Whoever said I did is a liar, sheriff! I never even——"

"Well," Langtry broke in recklessly, "you're goin' to hold up one now—unless you want to spend the week on bread an' water! I mean that, Ratty! I want to get a certain letter that's comin' in this evenin's mail—just why, doesn't matter—an' the only way I can get it is to have the stage held up an' the mail bag delivered to me! I can't pull the job myself, because I wouldn't have any way of explainin' my absence! But it's different with you! I'll let on that, instead o' lockin' you up for punishment, I banished you from the county, an', to make the story good, you can stay away for a month or so!"

Ratty's indignation vanished, but his fright deepened.

"Yuh mean, rob the United States mail? Gosh, Langtry, I don't mind stickin' up the stage, if it'll help yuh any, but that mail belongs to Uncle Sam! If I got caught——"

"But you won't get caught," Langtry

interrupted him impatiently. "I'm takin' care o' that! You can stop the stage on my side o' the county line, cache the mail bag under the Owl Creek bridge, then head east. When my posse starts after you, I'll see that they ride west! An' nobody'll connect you with the holdup, anyway. They'll all think it was Wolf Yager that done it, because I'm goin' to phone the sheriff at Terrapin Flats beforehand that he was seen in that vicinity! If Yager gets caught later on an' proves his innocence, well an' good. The robbery will be laid to some party unknown. An', as far as the mail bag is concerned, as soon as I get the letter I want, I'll see that it's found an' returned safely to the post office!"

RATTY DEVINE was feeling more like himself now. Evidently, he realized that he had this proud sheriff just where he wanted him. Once more his eyes gleamed craftily.

"Yeh, it sounds all right for yuh," he whined, "but not so good for me! What'll I do afterward—with no friends, no place to go an' no——"

"I'm takin' care o' that, too," Langtry cut in crisply. "In addition to your liberty, I'm offerin' you three hundred dollars, cash—all the money I've got in the safe! Now, what do you say?"

Ratty's exultant grin was sufficient answer.

"O. K. with me, sheriff! When do I start?"

Langtry crossed to his safe, drew out the money and handed it over, together with the other's gun.

"You saddle up an' leave right now," he ordered, his voice as cold as the light in his eyes. "But, remember this! There's to be no shootin'! If Pop Forbush refuses to stop, let him go on! An' nothin' is to be taken from the stage except the mail bag! Disobey them instructions, or try to double-cross me in any way, an' I'll follow you to the ends o' the earth! You get me?"

Evidently, Ratty did, for the grin faded from his face and he started off at once. His departure was none too soon, for it was already past six o'clock, and if he wished to hold up the stage near the Owl Creek bridge he must arrive there by seven. No doubt but what he'd make it, though, reflected Langtry grimly. The only thing that remained to be done was to call up the sheriff at Terrapin Flats and tip him off about Wolf Yager. This he did, not because he put much faith in Ratty's story, but because, for his plan to be successful, it was necessary that Yager bear the suspicion. Then he started out to get something to eat. He was not hungry, but he could not sit there in idleness. Already, his thoughts were commencing to take a most disturbing turn.

In the doorway he almost collided with young Slater, whose features reflected no little excitement.

"I just heard about that shootin' affair at the Yellow Front," he explained, "an' the bartender said you was aimin' to put Ratty Devine on bread an' water for a week! How come, you decided to let him off?"

Langtry regarded him frowningly.

"Am I lettin' him off?"

"Well," returned his deputy, in some confusion, "I just saw him walkin' down the street with his gun!"

"Mebbe you did! He was goin' for his hoss. I give him ten minutes to get out o' town!"

Still the young fellow did not appear satisfied.

"But, don't you think that's kinda risky," he protested, "with him an' Jerky Coleman still nursin' their grouch?"

Langtry could no longer conceal his irritation.

"Seems like you're tryin' to do my thinkin' for me, Slater! When I order a man to leave town, he generally does!

But if you're afraid that Ratty won't, why don't you shadow him?"

Evidently, the deputy could not understand what had come over his chief. His expression wavered between perplexity and resentment. Then his chin went up.

"All right, I will," he retorted, and, turning on his heel, he strode brusquely away.

PALS for years, this was the first clash that had come between the two. In his present mood, however, Langtry cared little. He could not be expected to remain friendly toward the man who had involved him in such a predicament, whether intentionally, or no. With narrowed eyes and tightly compressed lips he made his way to the nearest restaurant—which lay quite a distance from the Elite Café —and ordered a substantial meal. But, if he had hoped to stifle the voice of conscience by this means, he was mistaken. After spending almost an hour there, watching the clock and dabbling with his food, he returned to his office, lit the lamp and tried to interest himself in a report.

For over half an hour he worked—with no better success. And it was something more than conscience that was bothering him now. It was Ratty Devine! How could he be sure that Ratty would carry out his part of the agreement! With three hundred dollars in his pocket and a two-hour start, he might decide to keep on going! Worse still, he might have accepted Langtry's proposition for the sole purpose of exposing him. In that case, Langtry would either be sent back to Magdalena, or, if he succeeded in eluding the law, be compelled to spend the rest of his days as a despised and hunted criminal!

Cold perspiration broke out upon him at the thought.

"My gosh, what a fool I've been," he groaned, "puttin' my life in the hands of a coyote like that! There ain't one chance in ten he'll play square, 'cause he hates me like poison an' he ain't goin' to let a measly three hundred bucks stand in the way of his revenge! I reckon flight is the best course, after all! An' the sooner I get started——"

In the act of arising, he paused. From without had come the sound of approaching hoofs, followed by the rumble of a heavy vehicle—the eight o'clock stage! On the instant, Langtry had left his chair and was at the window, his heart in his throat. The depot lay less than a block north of his office, on the opposite side of the street, and, though the shades of night had now fallen, the glow from its windows enabled him to observe the arrival of the stage plainly. One glance at it and all his fears vanished. For it drew up with a suddenness that struck fire from the brake-shoes, and, before it had quite come to a stop, old "Pop" Forbush was scrambling down from his seat, his high-pitched voice reaching to where Langtry stood.

"Hey, folks! Where's the sheriff? Anybody seen the sheriff?"

So Ratty had played square, after all! No need for Langtry to think of flight now! In a few hours more the Malapi Kid's picture would be in his possession! And, once that picture were destroyed, he would have no further cause for worry, for he had made Slater too disgusted with his scheme to send for another. But he realized that this was no time for such reflections, pleasing as they might be. Already, he could hear the crowd gathering in response to the driver's cries, and it was necessary that he exhibit a little interest himself. Without pausing to secure his hat or gun, he started for the depot.

He had not expected to find a crowd as large as this. They stood about the stage, three deep, some white-faced and silent, others loudly voicing their de-

nunciation. Puzzled at such a display of excitement, since holdups were not uncommon around Jubilee, Langtry elbowed his way up to the stage door where Pop Forbush was standing, relating the occurrence to the station agent.

"O' course, it must have been Wolf Yager," the old fellow was saying. "'Cause Sheriff Hackett told me, just before I pulled out o' Terrapin Flats, that he'd been seen in that vicinity! Besides, it wasn't so dark there by the bridge but what——"

"Right, Pop," Langtry interrupted crisply. "Wolf Yager, it must have been, because I happen to know that he was in that vicinity myself! What did he get this time?"

The driver turned upon him like a flash.

"What did he get? Oh, nothin' much! Only a bag o' mail, ten thousand in cash, an' about two hundred dollars wuth o' valuables!"

Langtry gaped at him, unable to believe his ears.

"You—you mean, he robbed the strong box an' the passengers, too?"

The old fellow returned his stare.

"Why, o' course! What else would he hold us up for? But that ain't the worst! Look here!" As he spoke, he stepped aside and revealed the figure of one of his passengers lying stretched out, full length, upon the rear seat. "This gent was foolish enough to reach for a gun, but Yager beat him to it—shot him plumb dead!"

For a moment the sheriff stood as one transfixed, the stage and old Pop Forbush and the crowd only a blur before his eyes. So this was why Ratty Devine had accepted his proposition—not for the sake of his liberty or for Langtry's three hundred dollars, but for the opportunity it offered of pulling off a real holdup with impunity! Treacherous as he knew Ratty to be, the sheriff had never dreamed that he would go to such lengths as this. What had started out to be no more than a petty theft had now developed into wholesale robbery and murder! And he, Bill Langtry, was as legally guilty of those crimes as the one who had committed them!

TO the expectant crowd, his silence must have seemed only a reflection of their own emotions. They could not know of the titanic struggle that was going on within Langtry's breast. But it was a struggle that did not last long. Under the circumstances, he realized that there was but one thing to be done. Whirling about, he picked out two or three men standing near him.

"Saddle up, Carter! You, too, Adams! Lefty, you go round up Dick Slater! We're headin' for the Owl Creek bridge in ten minutes!"

Lips compressed, eyes bent straight before him, he turned and started back toward his office. In that mood he did not notice the little white-clad figure who immediately left the crowd and followed him. But, as he entered his doorway, he felt a hand upon his arm, and, turning, found himself face to face with Bessie Slater.

"You—you are surely going to be careful, aren't you?" she questioned anxiously.

A lump came into Langtry's throat, but he fought it down.

"Me? Careful o' what?"

"Of this Wolf Yager," she insisted. "I know how deadly he is with a gun, and——"

"I ain't goin' to have anything to do with Wolf Yager," Langtry retorted recklessly. "It wasn't him that held up that stage! It was Ratty Devine!"

The girl stared at him in bewilderment.

"Ratty Devine? But I just heard you tell the driver——"

"What I told the driver was a lie,"

he cut in fiercely. "I knew, all the time, that it was Ratty—because I was the one who asked him to do it!"

He had burned the last bridge behind him now, and there was no turning back. In a few brief but graphic sentences he acquainted her with the interview between her brother and himself, with the arrest of Ratty Devine and with the bargain that followed.

"I must have been mad when I done it," he concluded wretchedly, "but I couldn't bear the thought o' losin' you an' that little ranch. It was the only happiness left me. But, it's all over now! I'm guilty o' robbery an' murder, an' I've got to pay the penalty for it!"

As she listened, the girl's face had paled with consternation. Now she leaned back against the wall, shocked in every fiber of her being. But in her eyes was no hint of rebuke.

"O Bill," she cried chokingly. "Why didn't you tell me before—tell me, and save yourself all this——"

Langtry caught her just in time.

"You mean," he demanded hoarsely, "that it wouldn't have made any difference, even if you knew I was the Malapi Kid?"

"Difference?" she sobbed. "How could it? To a few narrow-minded people, perhaps, but not to me or——"

"Me, either," came a voice from the doorway, as her brother stepped into the room. "I was just in time to overhear the last o' your story, Langtry! If you've acted like a fool, then so have I! It's lucky we both learned our lesson before it was too late!"

Releasing the girl, Langtry spun upon his deputy sharply.

"Before it's too late?" he echoed. "Do you think I'm aimin' to take the coward's course again? Not much! All I want to live for now is to get the man that double-crossed me, then come back, turn in my star an' take my medicine! Come on!"

Slater stepped in front of him, his dark eyes glowing with a peculiar light.

"We'll go out an' get your man, all right," he assented, "but you ain't turnin' in your star till next week! The only crime you've been guilty of is in your imagination, Langtry! It wasn't Ratty Devine who held up that stage!"

The sheriff turned from him fiercely.

"Cut it, Slater! I'm done with lyin'! I'm facin' the bare facts now, an'——"

"But these *are* the bare facts," his deputy insisted. "It couldn't have been Ratty, because he never got out o' town! Half an hour after I left you I found him layin' in that grove o' willows down by the spring with a bullet through his heart—shot to death by Jerky Coleman, whom I just brought in to the doctor! So the man who really held up that stage must have been the one the driver thought it was—Wolf Yager!"

In Next Week's Issue, "HOMESTEADER'S CHANCE," by RAY HUMPHREYS.

GOLD ORE FOR RAILROAD BEDS

A NEW use has been found for the much-coveted gold ore. It is to be used as a bed for railroad tracks. Forty-five tons of the ore was recently brought by ship to Seattle, Washington, from the famous Gastineau mines near Juneau, Alaska. The ship brought down the ore as ballast, and it is only fair to inform any prospective gold miners, who think they might ride the rods and scoop up a fortune from the roadbed, that the ore has already been through the crusher and that all gold that it is profitable to remove has been taken out.

WESTERN WILD FLOWERS

(Wood Lily)

By

PAULINE DILLY

PERHAPS the most colorful of the lily family found in the woods is the Wood Lily, which has a bright-green stem and leaves that are long and narrow, placed alternately upon the stem. The flower cup opens upward and the six petals within are held in a cuplike position. The ends of each petal are pointed, tapering to a very slender base.

The flowers of this variety are of a deep, orange-red color, spotted with varying shades of brown and purple. The yellow, pollen-bearing anther are supported upon long, slender filaments. The Wood Lily is found in dry, rich prairie soil, also, in some parts of the West in boggy ground.

Another flower of the lily family which is similar to the Wood Lily, except that its flowers hang pendulously instead of looking upward, is the Yellow Lily, also known as Meadow and Canada Lily. Six leaves form a circle about the stem at varying distances from each other. From the topmost circle of narrow, pointed, light-green leaves, appear the flowers, each hanging from the tip of a long, upright, slender stem—a stem which seems too frail to hold so large a flower. There are usually three or four stems extending from the leaf base, each one containing a single blossom.

The Yellow Lily is buff colored on the outside with more of an orange on the inside, spotted with brown and purple. The wild honey bee fertilizes this flower, as well as the leaf-cutter bee. The pollen is more brown than yellow. This lily is probably the most popular because it grows widely and is well known. While the color is not as unusual as the Wood Lily, its graceful curves are unsurpassed in either wild or cultivated flower.

A third species, not often found farther west than Minnesota, is the Turk's Cap. Its petals neither look up nor down, but turn back toward the stem, exposing the filaments and brown anthers. The flower is a pale, pinkish yellow, thickly spotted with brown. They hang in a half-drooping position somewhat in between that taken by the Wood Lily and Yellow Lily. The leaves of the Turk's Cap circle the stem, but turn upward and are set close together all the way from the base.

SNOW TRAIL

By GEORGE CORY FRANKLIN

Author of "Bar-nothin'," etc.

TOSSING the last long aspen pole he had dragged down from the forest behind his cabin to the top of a great rick of firewood, Gus Talbot pulled the sled he had been using to the end of a comfortable, well-built log cabin and stood, arms akimbo, looking at the harvest he had garnered. A sense of security and physical well being came to him as he turned from looking at his abundant supply of firewood to glance at a smaller cabin fifty feet beyond the warm spring that bubbled from the hillside. In that storehouse Gus had hung his winter's meat. Only two days before a great mountain sheep had been dragged in and hung up beside the carcasses of two deer killed earlier in the fall, before the rutting season had caused the meat to become strong.

In a cellar dug into the bank behind the cabin was stored sufficient vegetables to last the miner till far into the summer when the trails to Two Forks, ten miles down the Roaring Fork, would be dry and dusty. Within the cabin were groceries of every kind to be purchased in the store at Two Forks, for the pay streak in the drift of Talbot's claim had widened out that summer and Gus had money, plenty of money, and a good prospect for unlimited wealth when he drove the drift farther into the mountain, as he would that winter.

Gus looked forward to days of happy work in the tunnels and long evenings by the fireplace, with a well-loved book

from the shelf of treasures he had purchased with as much care for his mental cravings as he had made for his physical appetite and comforts.

The miner went into his cabin, lit a fire in the cookstove at the end of the room and then, in sheer extravagance born of the abundance about him, he laid sweet-smelling pieces of golden-pitch splinters in the fireplace and watched the tiny flame from his match reach up hungrily through the spaces between the sticks he laid above it. There is something fascinating to the woods dweller in watching the beginnings of a fire that in a few minutes will be roaring up the throat of the chimney, sending sparks into the frosty air.

The light from the glowing blaze lit up Talbot's strong Norse face and caused Ole Johnson, his neighbor from over on Porcupine Creek, to stand in the doorway while he watched Gus enjoy his celebration over the completion of his preparations for winter. Gus heard the door creak as Ole closed it behind him and turned to see who had entered.

"Hello, Ole," he greeted. "Glad you came. I was just wishing I had somebody to enjoy my venison steaks with me to-night."

"Heh-heh," giggled the Swede, "you oughta get married, Gus. You bane need a wife, rich man like you."

"Not on your life, Ole," Talbot answered. "I know when I'm well off. Look at the men who have families. Every one of 'em has to slave and work for some company. Wages is all they have, and all they will ever have. I am free to live on much or little, whichever I have, and that's why I was able to open up my claims. It hasn't all been like it is now by a long shot."

"Aye know what you mean," Ole agreed soberly. "Dat Knute Benson over on the Cimmarron is in heck of a fix right now."

"What's the matter with Knute?" Gus asked as he went to his cupboard and began the preparation of such a meal as Ole would remember all winter.

Ole hung his canvas coat against the wall and began slowly removing his snow pacs.

"Well, Knute he bane have bad luck. No much work and big family to feed. Him wife die. Two leetle kids die. His oldest girl come back from school to take care of them and storm catch her on Lower Cimmarron. She no can go back now. The Pass closed for the winter."

Gus wished Ole had kept his gossip to himself. Even the thought of what life on the Cimmarron would be like to a person who had known better things, as this girl must have, was depressing. That country was barren, not even forests, and so of course, no game. Gus wondered why Benson had not moved out before the early snows came.

Ole placed his wet snow pacs where the heat from the fire would dry them out and leaned back comfortably in Gus's armchair.

"Knute he bane have hard time," he went on telling of the sad experiences of this man who had ventured beyond the frontier.

A pan crashed from Gus's hand to the floor. Would nothing turn this old crape-hanger from his depressing story. What good did it do to rehearse the details of such an experience? Gus couldn't help it, the only effect was to make him more and more convinced that the man who assumed the responsibilities of a family was a fool. Ole warmed to his subject, he even described in detail the sufferings of Knute's little boy who had died from pneumonia, chiefly because Knute could not leave him to go for food or medicine. Instead of the free, companionable evening spent in discussing his prospects for the next year that Gus had anticipated, he was forced to listen to the old Swede's dole-

ful argument that nothing could possibly prevent Knute and his daughter from starving during the winter.

Gus felt relieved when at last Ole's snoring announced that his croaking tale of poverty was over. He stretched himself comfortably in his blankets and lay watching the fire dying out in the fireplace, but instead of the sense of comfort he usually experienced at such times, Gus's mind was filled with the pictures Ole had been painting.

THE blackened ends of half-burned logs seemed symbolical of the poverty of which he had been hearing. A brave little flame at one side struggled for fuel to feed upon. Gus watched it with an intensity that shut out all thought of drowsiness or comfort. He raised up, supporting his body on one elbow and breathing heavily as the leaps of the little flame grew shorter and shorter until with one last spark of brilliance, it went out and Gus fell back in his blankets, weak from the nervous strain he had experienced as his mind pictured in the fire the struggle of Knute Benson's little boy to live and the tragic death because his flame of life had naught to feed upon.

From this his thoughts turned to the possibility of giving aid to the man and his daughter, all that was left of the ill-fated family. If the weather held clear as it had been for the past three days in which he had hurried to get his winter's supply of wood to the cabin, he might get across the pass with a load of provisions but what good would one load do? At the best he could not haul more than four hundred pounds up that steep pitch this side of Hurricane Peak. That would mean only a couple of months food for two people. They must starve eventually, anyway. Gus turned over and tried to forget Ole's story, but the droning sound of the man's snoring seemed to repeat the same tale of suffering and sorrow.

"Sta-a-rving, sta-arving," sighed the sleeping Swede.

Gus tossed his blankets back and got up, put on more wood and sat by the fire. From passive sympathy he had suddenly turned to active planning. In memory he went over every dangerous spot between his cabin and the top of the pass. There were two bad places on this side, one where a spring formed a nasty stretch of glare ice on the hillside, the other at Big Casino Gulch where snowslides were of frequent occurrence. For the ice he would take a sharp pick and long rope. The slide—well, that was different. He would have to look that over. If there were no more snow for two days—— Gus went outside and looked at the myriads of stars blazing in a sky that gave no evidence of a storm. He went back to the house to study the aneroid barometer which modern prospectors carry. It read a trifle low, but there was nothing alarming about that. Aneroids are proverbially sensitive to other things than the atmospheric disturbances which indicate a storm; heat, cold, even a hard blow, would cause the needle to move on the dial. Gus had made his decision. He dressed for the trip and then woke up his guest.

Ole blinked like a great blond owl. "Vat for you shake me like dat?" he queried. "Did I keep you awake with my snoring?"

"No, Ole," Gus replied. "I'm going to cross the pass and bring Knute Benson's folks out."

"Yeah! Well, aye bane go too."

"No," Gus vetoed, "you can do more by staying here. Knute and I can bring the girl out. I'm taking a light toboggan and two extra pair of snowshoes besides a pair of good, stout skis. If it doesn't snow I can make it back here in three days. I'm taking grub for the trip."

"Yeah, but supposin' he do snow very hard? Dere's a million tons of

snow on dat Big Casino basin already. She slide—maybe to-day—maybe to-morrow."

"There's a way to deal with that, too," Gus answered as he took down the sack with which he carried giant powder to his tunnel.

"Aye see." Ole's placid face lighted up understandingly. "You bane goin' to shoot dat slide?"

"Maybe," Gus answered. "Now, see here, Ole. To-morrow is Wednesday, November 19th." Gus marked the date on a calendar that hung on the wall beneath a picture of a caballero roping a grizzly bear. "I'll be back on this side of Hurricane Peak sometime around noon Friday. If it doesn't storm, I'll be here before sundown with Benson and his girl. You can cook up a good supper so's to have it ready for us."

Ole had gone to the door and looked out. From far away over the frosty forest came the booming call of a snow owl starting on its evening hunt.

"Dem owl, she always hoot just before a storm."

He went back and stood before the fire, looking like a good-natured gnome in his red flannel underclothes.

"Wednesday you hit Cimmarron Flats," Ole soliloquized; "Thursday you come back to timber line on the Cimarron side, eh?"

Gus nodded. "I'll camp in that old abandoned cabin in Groundhog Park Thursday night."

"Uh-huh," encouraged Ole, "Mebbeso you bane do her if she don't snow."

"Good-by, Ole. See you Friday night."

"Good-by, Gus."

From the forest above the cabin an owl answered the cry of its mate. Ole shook his head doubtfully and went back to sit by the warm fire and think.

"Dem tam owls," he muttered under his breath.

THE first storms that fell had been wet and heavy. The snow had frozen into a solid mass of dry crystals, ideal for skiing. Gus made good time up the valley of the Roaring Fork and passed the icy place on the hillside a little after sunup. By picking a trench he had no great difficulty in crossing.

On top of the pass below Hurricane Peak he stopped for the first time in fourteen hours of steady travel and studied the horizon and again took the reading on the aneroid, which indicated eleven thousand feet. "You're a liar," Gus remarked. "Timber line is eleven thousand five hundred, and I know I'm at least a thousand feet above that."

Far down the valley he saw a filmy line of innocent appearing clouds, such as one sometimes sees float lazily over a valley on a mild summer day. Gus jerked the pull rope on his toboggan impatiently and turned the points of his skis down the Cimmarron side of the pass. Here the trees were more scattering affording not nearly the protection from wind that the heavy spruce forest of the Roaring Fork gave. At the edge of timber line Gus stopped and looked until he located the old cabin half covered with snow. He shoveled away the drift, left a bundle of provisions he had brought for the purpose and stopped long enough to drag in dry wood.

Before starting on toward Benson's camp, he turned the aneroid over and looked at the compass on the reverse side, taking the course for the pass and also reading in the opposite direction toward the valley of the Cimmarron.

"It's just as well to have those directions fixed in my mind," he thought. "Maybe I won't need them at all, but if I do I'll need them a lot."

The sun was down and a soft, mild breeze was blowing up the valley when Gus dragged his toboggan into a small clearing among a line of scattered, scraggly trees whose gnarled, bare arms,

twisted into clawlike branches, made Gus think of pictures he had seen depicting some toothless old virago. He shuddered at the idea of living in such an outlandish place. He reached the Benson cabin, and knocked gently.

A girl of eighteen opened the door. Gus stepped back in surprise. Here where he had expected to find poverty and desolation stood a neatly dressed young woman whose steady blue eyes masked any hint of anxiety or fear. For a moment Gus felt that he had been tricked into an unnecessary trip. The delicious odor of venison simmering in a big kettle came strong to his nostrils. He walked into the cabin stiffly, as men do who have snowshoed for many hours.

The blankets on a bed in the corner moved and a tousled head was raised from a clean, white pillow.

"Talbot!" exclaimed the man. "Whatever brought you across the pass with a storm brewing among the peaks?"

"Heard you were starving," Gus answered bluntly. "Came to see if I could help you."

"Hah-hah, starving! That's a joke. Why, lad, I'm rich. I struck a pocket last month. I've got gold, gold, thousands, maybe millions!"

There was something unnatural in the tones of Benson's voice. Gus turned at the gentle touch on his arm.

"Don't cross him," whispered the girl. "He's ill. He's been like that for days."

Gus glanced about the cabin which was spotlessly clean, saw a few empty cans on the shelves. A flour sack hung limply against the wall, seemingly to fairly shout its emptiness and yet the stew bubbling on the fire sent forth a cheery odor of richness and suggestion of plenty.

"Would you bring me some wood?" the girl asked, motioning toward the rear of the cabin.

Gus understood. He went outside. A moment later the girl came to him.

"Father is feverish," she told Gus without a quiver. "I'm cooking the last of our food now. He has made me cook more than we needed, insisting that we have plenty. It was the only way I could keep him quiet. His leg is broken. I have set it as best I could."

Again Gus looked out at the scraggly trees. A slight strengthening of the wind caused a mourning sound as if the hags were commencing a dirge over the bodies of the victims of the approaching storm. Strong man that he was, familiar with all the strange phantasies of the wilderness, Gus shivered.

"How long have you had to stand this?" he asked.

"A month. Mother and the two boys went first. It must have been a blessed relief to them not to have to look any longer at"—a sob caught in the girl's throat. She motioned toward the trees —"at that—to count the number of meals left and calculate what day death by starvation would actually begin."

USELESS as the task appeared to Gus, there was one possible, very faintly possible, chance. Hardly that, either. It was a trifle less positive a certainty of death by starvation than to stay where they were. He had started out to save Knute Benson's family. The task as he had seen it half an hour before would have been trivial as compared with what he faced now, but he could not show less courage than this slip of a girl who was preparing what she had supposed was her last meal, and yet even now gave no sign of weakening.

"Can you snowshoe?" he demanded.

"Of course. I am Tess Benson. I was born in the wilderness and have lived here except for the three years I have been away at school."

"Ole Johnson told me about you yesterday," Gus explained, "about your mother and the little boys. I've got a good camp on the Roaring Fork, plenty

of supplies and lots of wood. I've left a little grub in the cabin on this side of the pass. We'll put your father on the toboggan and I'll pull him. We must start at daylight and make that cabin to-morrow. If this storm would only hold off twenty-four hours."

"It doesn't make much difference," Tess's voice was calm, unemotional. "When you have looked at nothing but death for weeks you get so that any chance to push it back an inch or two gives you satisfaction. Victory for a few hours is as positive as for a few years."

Gus felt that it was nothing short of criminal to hold out the uncertain hope of life and comfort to a girl who had suffered what Tess must have undergone during those weeks since her mother had succumbed to the merciless law of the heights. His very familiarity with the problems to be encountered on such a trip as the one which confronted them convinced him of the futility of the attempt. He knew the storm was coming, knew it as well as he did a dozen hours later when he was digging at the ice and snow on the hillside, with hands torn till the blood trickled from under his finger nails, struggling to gain a yard more of space between him and death. Even if he should perform the miracle of dragging a full-grown man up that slippery hillside on a toboggan, still there was the utter impossibility of crossing Big Casino Gulch with a fresh blanket of drifting snow covering the frozen mass now on the ground. The flutter of a snowbird's wing would cause the slide to run under such conditions.

They went back into the warmth of the cabin. Tess laughed bravely, and almost as naturally as girls living softer lives under easier conditions might have laughed over some trivial joke. There was nothing hysterical or forced about her. It was plainly the expresson of emotion coming from a spirit that had gained a plane above that of physical fear. Star-eyed, she romped with Rusty, a great long-haired, wolf-like dog who leaped at her throat, snapping playfully jaws that might have torn her to pieces as easily as they had torn the big snowshoe rabbit on which it had just dined.

Slowly it was borne upon Talbot that here was a person full of life, possessed of all the emotions and desires that any normal person might have who had faced death alone in this rock wilderness until she no more feared it than she did the dog with which she played.

From absolute conviction that they would not live through the next forty-eight hours, Gus began to feel a desire to pit his strength against the incalcuable powers that reigned supreme on the heights, regardless of whether he won or not. Something of the spirit Tess possessed came to him, and instead of attempting to figure out how he would cross Big Casino Gulch on the other side of the divide, he began to consider the chances of even leaving the cabin where they then were.

He, too, would push death back a few minutes for the sheer love of the struggle, not with any thought of what lay beyond, success or failure. With Benson swathed in blankets and roped firmly to the toboggan they started at daylight. Tess walked behind, encouraging the patient, telling him that they would return next spring and mine the gold of which he dreamed.

The air was like early spring, but Gus was not in the least deceived. Even now around the crags along the high peaks he could see a film of snow blowing off to the south. He dared not hurry, and yet every yard he could gain before the new snow came to make the toboggan pull harder delayed the inevitable failure by that much. Rusty raced joyfully ahead, giving forth a series of sharp barks of encouragement, and then ran back to walk beside Tess, as if to assure her of his protection.

Again that defiant laugh rang out. "Look, Gus," Tess encouraged, "Rusty says we can make it, and he's a snow dog if there ever was one."

"Sure we'll make it," Gus lied. "Ain't we come a mile already, and I haven't got warmed up yet."

A STRONGER blast of wind came up the valley and tore around the bleak trunks of the scraggly trees, causing a shriek of derision to echo from the barren rocks above. Gus leaned to his work and plodded on. The weight of the heavily loaded toboggan increased as he struggled up the steeper slope toward the pass, but by taking shorter pulls and more frequent breathing spells he managed to keep going.

Tess came forward and threw the weight of her lithe young body on the ropes. Rusty teased to be permitted to help and taking the end of a rope Gus tossed him in his powerful jaws, he backed up the grades, jerking playfully and giving forth short growls of pretended rage. Gus and the girl laughed at the clownlike antics of the dog.

Benson's fever-stricken mind cleared as the sun burst through the mists above and sent a cheering beam into his face. He began to talk of other days and youthful adventures, and even advised his rescuers to take advantage of the harder snow in the high places above the drifts. He ceased to talk of his placer, and became rational.

A strange exultation came to Tess and Gus. They were pushing the twin monsters of cold and starvation back by the force of their own courage and strength. That this progress was slow in comparison with the speed of the brewing storm made no impression on them.

Toward midafternoon the wind changed and began blowing down the mountain into their faces, sending a spray of fine particles up into their eyes. Gus stopped and gauged the distance to the cabin.

"It's going to be tough here in a few minutes," he told Tess. "Take Rusty and go on to the cabin. Build a fire so that when I get there we can have a warm place for him." He nodded toward the sleigh.

The girl shook her head and smiled bravely. "You can't cheat me out of my part of this fight," she said. "I can stand as much as you can. Half a mile more and we'll be safe for the night at least."

Inspired by such courage Gus made no more attempts to protect Tess from fatigue and allowed her a full share in the work. Clouds settled down, shutting out the light. The wind ceased. Snow fell silently, piling up in furrows before the toboggan. Ptarmigan, those unfailing storm prophets of the high country, crowed jubilantly as they burrowed into safe places beneath the white blanket.

Benson lifted his head, peering into the snow-filled air above them. "We're sure goin' into a old he-man's storm," he told the young people. "Hear them snow chickens squawk. If we don't cross that pass to-night we'll never make it."

Gus paid no attention to the old man's croakings. He had long ago foreseen every condition they had met that day, and more. Every hour, yes every minute, was precious if he hoped to cross Big Casino before darkness tomorrow made it impossible. Tess had pulled no small share of the load that day, something Gus would not have believed any woman could do. She must have rest and so must he, rest in order to push death back another hour or two.

The outline of the cabin appeared through the storm. Gus's big voice roared out in triumph.

"We're makin' the grade, girl," he exulted, "and we'll hold what we've got a few hours anyway."

Gus burst open the door and dragged

the toboggan inside the room. In ten minutes the light of a cheery fire crackled in the old fireplace and sent defiant flames up into the storm above.

Benson was more comfortable than at any time since the accident. He sat by the fire and watched Tess and Gus as they prepared a feast of fat venison steaks and boiled potatoes.

Nothing that Gus had ever accomplished before had brought him half the satisfaction that came from this day's work and now the mental struggle to keep from thinking what life might be with such a comrade as Tess was as great as the physical effort he had put forth that day. To-night they were secure, warm, well fed, comfortable. So far Gus had succeeded. What if to-morrow found them all cold and stiff at the bottom of some snow-filled gorge? For to-night, at least, the storm was defeated. They were as safe here as the ptarmigan out there beneath the drifts.

A new motive came to Gus. He had long been credited with being the best snow fighter of that hard country. He knew that what he had done that day would become a historic accomplishment in the record of the Burning Heights. When spring came and the icy grip of winter was forced to release its grasp, bearded men would remove their hats and stand in respect for what he had done in dragging a helpless man even this far up the mountain, and every yard he gained before the heights took their toll and froze their bodies into ineffaceable witnesses to his strength and courage, would add to the luster of his fame. No higher crown could be sought by a mountain man than of death in fighting the forces of nature.

WITH the return of light Gus prepared for the high point of his adventure. More than a foot of fresh snow had fallen during the night, but as yet there was no wind. If he could cross the pass and reach Big Casino before the snow piled too deep, there was yet a chance to win. He wrapped Benson carefully in his blankets and cautioned Tess about her preparations to combat the low temperature in the pass.

"We won't feel the cold much going up this side," he told her, "but even if there's no wind here, the air will suck through that narrow place with terrible force. Have you anything you can wrap around your head?"

Tess took from the pocket of her canvas coat a narrow, brilliantly colored silk scarf. The beauty of the girl stirred the blood of the man. The red of the scarf enhanced the color of her cheeks. A broad orange stripe matched the ringlets curled tight against her head by the dampness of the storm, while the blue was exactly the same shade as the eyes he had come to associate with utter fearlessness. He wished that he could know that Tess would live through the day. His own life and that of her father seemed a part of the Burning Heights, but in spite of the work she was doing, the girl's appearance suggested to Gus's mind an atmosphere of comfort and warmth and rich, wholesome security.

Gus picked up the pull rope and dragged the toboggan out of the cabin with a fierce jerk. What thoughts were these for a man who had but a few hours of life to live? Rusty looked up the hill and took a few steps down the mountain. Clearly he was advising against the foolishness of going any farther. Gus noticed the actions of the dog.

"I know, old-timer," he muttered, "you think I'm a fool and I think so, too, but here's where I push cold and starvation back another inch or two, as Tess said yesterday."

He looped the rope about his shoulders and started pulling up the slope toward where the wind moaned about the cliffs at the foot of the peak. Tess

struggled after the toboggan and, overtaking it, took hold of the rope again. Rusty looked after them, whined and then started down the mountain, putting forth his best argument against the thing these foolish humans were attempting.

Gus did not look back again. His mind was centered wholly on the tricks and artifices of the storm demon that shrieked defiance at the puny invaders of his domain. Rusty saw that his arguments were useless. He turned, and with his long, plumelike tail trailing forlornly in the path behind him, followed the toboggan. Animal courage, the instinct of wolf ancestry, did not seem quite able to face what these two humans, supported by a spiritual force, were combating.

Up the slope in the very teeth of the wind Gus forced his way, Tess moving close to him so that his body partially sheltered her from the fury of the blast. The snow, packed by the wind, ensheathed the blankets wrapped about Benson until he resembled a huge white cocoon. Protecting his lungs from taking the frost through his open mouth by holding one mittened hand over his face, Gus kept on to the top of the slope. Here the wind tore through the narrow space between two cliffs with such fury that he was forced to lie down. Tess fell beside him and Gus saw that she had wrapped the scarf about her head in such a manner as to keep the snow out of her face. He shouted to her to hold fast to the rope while he crawled to the protection of a boulder just ahead. The girl indicated that she understood by nodding her head.

Gus wormed his way over the hard-packed snow until he reached the rock, then jerked the rope as a signal for the girl to come and hold it tight while she dragged her body across the dangerous spot to rest beside him. Together they hauled the toboggan to the safety of the rock. Rusty came crawling on his belly, his shaggy face covered with ice except for two round bright eyes. He cuddled close to Tess, whimpering like a pup. The natural courage of a brave animal was breaking under the strain of the shrieking wind.

For four hours Gus fought his way from one protecting rock to another, and always when he jerked the rope he felt the weight of Tess's body as she followed him. Yard by yard, foot by foot, inch by inch, these two brave spirits pushed death before them over the wind-packed snow until they felt, rather than saw, that the slope had changed, and that the sled came forward with less resistance. But for the heroic sense which caused men to fight, even when there is nothing left to fight for, Gus would never have made that last hundred feet. He was two hours behind the time which he had decided to be the extreme limit which he could spare and still reach Big Casino while yet some light remained.

An unfamiliar spirit of exhilaration rose up within him. Until now Tess had inspired him to keep up the useless struggle. He decided to tell her that the worst was over, though he knew it was a lie. The next time she dragged her exhausted body into the shelter of the rock where he waited he shouted in her ear.

"We've crossed the high point. It's downhill from here on."

Again Tess nodded, but not with the same assurance she had shown before. A cold fear gripped the heart of the man as he saw a stain of crimson on the orange of the silken scarf. Those telltale drops could mean but one thing. The covering had been insufficient and the girl had breathed frost. He tried to think that the blood had not come from her lungs. There was no time now to stop to learn the extent of her injury. He must make the protection of the cliffs before he stopped if possible.

Again he slid forward. This time

Tess did not wait for a signal, but followed him closely, stumbling, weaving through the fog. The toboggan began running of its own weight, Gus saw, and he was quick to take advantage. The last hundred feet of the perilous passage, man, girl, toboggan and dog slid down the slope together into the shelter of the cliff.

A HUNDRED yards farther and Gus stopped near a clump of trees. Never had the comforts of his own safe cabin seemed as desirable as they did now. If only he could move back the oncoming darkness an hour. He pictured Tess in the big easy-chair beside the fireplace. A sob shook his body as he turned back to look at the snow-covered toboggan with the helpless man tied upon it. He was fighting winter in its own realm on the very heights where life flickered like a candle in the breath of hell itself.

The girl sat in the snow, her shoulders drooped forward. Gus saw that the crimson stain on the scarf had widened a little since he had first noticed it. He knew that he must get Tess into warmer air. If her lungs had been touched enough to cause bleeding there was no hope.

"Better let her die here," argued the devil of discouragement, "rather than suffer for months as Gene Hathaway did last winter."

"Don't you try to help any more," Gus told her. "I can handle the toboggan. You follow in the track behind."

Tess looked up at him and tried to smile. Rusty licked her hand, laying his ice-covered head against her, expressing more sympathy than a human might have done by a torrent of words. Some pent-up emotion broke the bonds of repression within the mountain man, a second wind, a superstrength. His aching muscles were quieted or overshadowed by the greater ache in his heart.

WITH fingers that were like crooked rods of steel, stiff and awkward, he tore at the frozen ropes which bound the blankets about the half-dead miner. He kicked the snow from the blankets and unwrapped Benson, paying no attention to the shiver that ran through the weakened man. A moment later and he had laid the girl beside her father, placing a ski on either side to increase the width sufficient to support the added burden, and was again binding the blanets about the two. On top of the heavy load he tied his snowshoes and those of the girl. Something warm touched his hand. Rusty was looking up with eyes that pleaded for his life.

"All right, Rusty," he shouted, "you too." He lifted the dog and laid him in the space under the covered front of the toboggan, took hold of the sides and, running behind, gave the toboggan a mighty push. Then as it began to gain impetus, he sprang on behind, exerting a strength greater than he had ever known that he possessed in order to hold the vehicle on a course that no man had ever attempted before in crossing the pass.

The trail used in the short summer months led along the south side of the valley of the Roaring Fork, fully half a mile from the narrow box canyon toward which the overloaded toboggan was racing with terrific speed. Gus had been moved in those few dynamic moments to take the only opportunity offered to get Tess into a lower altitude where he might possibly stop an incipient hemmorhage. It was not until he was committed to a route from which there was no possible way to escape that he remembered something that caused him to almost loosen his grip upon the ropes.

"The bluff!" he gasped. "Good heavens! I forgot that I'm steering straight for the bluff at the east edge of Big Casino Gulch!"

It was a menace to chill the courage of even a man who had done such a superhuman thing as Gus had done this day—a fifty-foot perpendicular cliff over which the toboggan must inevitably go. That the entire party would be crushed into a shapeless mass there was no manner of doubt. A feeling that he was about to murder the people he had striven to rescue caused Gus to turn from the contemplation of the swiftly approaching catastrophe and look down into the white face of the girl he had bound beside her helpless father.

Tess's blue eyes were wide open. She was looking straight into those of the man who had given his life for her, and there was in them something that even now sent an electric thrill through Gus's tortured body. Down here below the pressure of the wind she could breathe more easily.

"I'm better," her lips formed the words though no sound reached the man's ears.

The snow fell in a mass which Gus's sight could penetrate, but a few yards. He remembered the package of powder which he had thawed out that morning and wrapped carefully in one of the blankets at the front of the toboggan so that he could use it to cause the snow-slide to run in case it still hung up there above the trail. He wondered if the shock of the fall would be great enough to cause the dynamite to explode. If it did every vestige of evidence of his heroic struggle would be destroyed. Even that satisfaction would be denied him. The wilderness would win down to the last white chip.

THE falling snow turned to an opaque mass like an impenetrable fog. He wondered when the big moment would come. Surely at the speed they were making they must be almost to the cliff at the mouth of Big Casino slide.

Ah, there it was! The toboggan had taken off and was sailing through space. Gus's mind seemed to be detached from his body. He had no consciousness now of motion. The fog was so thick that he could not even see Tess's face. He clung to the ropes and waited for the crash of the toboggan on the rocks at the foot of the cliff. He lost all sense of time. There was no feeling of falling, simply the same swift, gliding motion that he had experienced when he had started on this mad race five minutes—or was it five hours—before.

The toboggan rocked so violently as to nearly loosen his grip, jumped like a live thing, twisted and creaked, but there was no sudden jar. The speed was lessening now and the fog was a trifle less dense. Gus saw the trunk of an overturned tree flash by. That was strange; trees do not lie unsupported in swirling snow. The toboggan bumped along for a few yards and then suddenly stopped.

There was no fog here, nothing but the silently falling flakes sifting down through the branches of the spruce. Gus stood up and looked about him in a daze of wonderment. Rusty came running, giving forth short, joyous barks of pure animal relief. Gus turned to look back at the track they had made down the mountainside. Understanding came to him as he saw that the narrow box canyon was piled to within three feet of the top by a mass of snow and broken branches of trees. Big Casino slide had run and filled the gulch so that the toboggan had ridden out the space below the cliff.

A wild, fierce determination seized the mountaineer. He tied on his snowshoes, and seizing the drag line, he threw his weight upon it. The toboggan moved slowly. Gus struggled on, dragging the cumbersome thing into the darkening shadows of the forest. Ten, twenty yards he fought his way. Once started, the toboggan moved more easily, but he dared not stop to rest for fear he would

be unable to start the heavy load a second time.

Rusty pushed ahead, barking short, sharp yelps of guidance. Gus gladly gave over to the dog the task of finding openings between the trees, and put his entire strength, physical and mental, into the dragging slavish task.

Lights flashed before his eyes, but did not deceive him. He had seen those before when exhausted. He centered his gaze on the plume now waving proudly over Rusty's shaggy back. The muscles of his arms lost all sensation, deadened by the lack of circulation of blood caused by the pressure of the ropes around his shoulders.

The dancing lights became concentrated in the one spot which seemed to be a part of the dog. Gus held to that. So long as the light shone above the dog he would follow it. His brain numbed. Once he fell and lay for a long minute in the snow. Rusty came back and licked his face. Gus struggled to his feet and pulled. He could not tell now whether the toboggan was coming or not. He seemed strangely detached from it all, as if his spirit had escaped from his body and floated beside the huge bulk that kept on pulling, tugging, following a light that was sometimes the waving tail of a great wolflike dog, at other times a bright beckoning star.

The roar of the wind lessened. He could hear a low monotone and at times sweet music associated with a delicate scent that suggested springtime and budding columbines. The light grew brighter. At times it flared up as the little flame had in the fireplace that night when Ole had told him of how Tess's little brother had died of starvation.

Gus's body seemed to be floating. He was tired, oh, so tired, but still that light beckoned him on, and something, it couldn't be his own hand, brushed the hair back from his eyes very tenderly. The roar of the wind seemed to become the voices of men, and one of the voices was Ole's. The other was Benson's. The strangely uncertain light became a steady, honest flame that was growing stronger every second. Again that gentle something passed over his forehead and eyes, and that delicious odor came to him. Gus sighed contentedly. Some one very close to him sobbed.

His eyes snapped open. He was looking at a fire which leaped and roared up the chimney of his own fireplace. Ole was busy about the stove. Something bubbled in a kettle. He was in his own bed, resting against the comforting warmth of blankets, and the hand that was gently rubbing his head was small and brown.

Gus raised up so quickly that his cheek touched that of the girl who was bending over him. His first thought was for her, as his last conscious one had been.

"Your lungs?" he queried. "Do you feel any pain?"

Again came that sweet music which he now identified as Tess's voice.

"My lungs are all right. You brought us through without harm." She put one small, brown finger against a tiny gash in her cheek. "See, that was the only scratch we got."

Later Ole told at Two Forks how he had been watching and had seen an unconscious man following a great dog who came straight toward the light of the open door. The man was incased in ice, but he dragged a toboggan on which were bound a man and a girl, straight through the door of the cabin before he collapsed, and had to be undressed and put to bed until he could be aroused from the sleep of death that had already begun.

"And dat gal of Benson's, she sure bane foolish over him. She won't let nobody wait on Gus but her, heh-heh."

WHEN WOLF MEETS WOLF

By FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE

Author of "Burned Ridges," etc.

THE newspapers had said that John Barrett was going broke. The mere statement that Barrett was in difficulties was sufficient to bring "Dad" Simms to his side, for John Barrett was a friend of Dad's. There had been other paragraphs in the story that caught Dad's eye, such as the vicious attack by a pack of financial "wolves," and the threat on Barrett's part that if conditions grew worse he must make a drastic cut in the wages of his thousands of employees. The newspapers also said that Barrett was a sick man and that a nervous breakdown threatened. But Dad Simms only remembered that Barrett was sick and broke. The rest did not matter. The little old sourdough slicked up his hair with his hand as he rode up in the elevator, and just before stepping out, he glanced in the mirror, gave his tie a final twist, and brushed his white beard. Then he briskly crossed the hall and stepped into Barrett's office.

Dad stepped up to a young lady presiding over a telephone switchboard and said:

"I'd like to see John Barrett. Just tell him I'm old man Simms from Cold Deck, Alaska."

"Please be seated," the girl replied, and presently Dad heard her talking to somebody.

A moment later a smooth young gen-

tleman approached. He was so slick-looking that somehow or other he reminded Dad of a tailor-made cigarette. He was very polite, and Dad had a hunch he could be equal to almost any occasion.

"I am Mr. Barrett's secretary," he explained. "Would you mind stating the nature of your business?"

"Not at all," Dad answered. "I just wanted to go in, slap the old cuss on the back, and help him forget his troubles. According to the papers, the wolves are after him pretty hard, and they do say as how he needs some money. Well, I got five thousand dollars he can have as long as he needs it."

The young man disappeared, but not for long. He looked very sad on his return. "I am very sorry, Mr. Simms," he said, "but Mr. Barrett is too busy to see you."

"Then I'll come back later, if you will just tell me when," Dad offered.

"Mr. Barrett is a very busy man," the other said stiffly. "I am afraid it would be several weeks before you could see him."

"Why, goldarn your pelt," Dad snorted, "you didn't even tell him I was out here! It looks to me as if I was up against a stone wall. Well, I'll just sit right down here and wait till he shows up. Then I'll give you the haw-haw."

Dad promptly carried out his threat by seating himself in the nearest chair. The slick secretary rubbed his chin thoughtfully, and then walked stiffly away. As soon as the youth was out of sight, Dad Simms slipped over to the telephone girl.

"It may be against orders and all that, sister, but if you will just sneak a call in to John Barrett and tell him old man Simms of Cold Deck, Alaska, is out here, you will be doing me a favor and him too."

It was almost as much as the girl's job was worth to call Barrett directly. But there was something so genuine about the old man that she decided to take a chance. In about ten seconds the door of a luxurious office burst open and a hundred Barrett office employees were startled to see their boss coming down under full sail. He did not bother to go through the gate but stepped over the fence that blocked off the public and warmly shook hands with a little old man whose eyes twinkled and whose face wrinkled in a happy smile. Then, arm in arm, the two returned to Barrett's private office. At the door Barrett paused and turned to the slick-looking secretary.

"I am not in to any one for the next hour," he said crisply.

"Yes, Mr. Barrett," the secretary answered, bowing; but the bow changed to a flush of uneasiness as Dad Simms winked and poked the tailor-made gentleman in the ribs with his stick.

"Sit down and have a cigar," Barrett said. And then as he seated himself Dad noticed that he dropped into the chair rather abruptly as though the strength in his legs had given way.

"Now tell me all about yourself," he directed, "and what are you doing in New York?"

"Well, my idea in coming to New York," Dad said, "was to get you interested in a big dredging proposition; but as soon as I hit this camp the papers were full of the fact that the wolves were after you from all sides and were just about to pull you down, like they do a moose up there in Alaska. I even judged you was broke, so instead of coming around and trying to get you interested in a dredging proposition I am here to slap you on the back and offer you five thousand dollars, and if I had more you could have it."

The tailor-made secretary in the outer office would probably have laughed at the thought of lending John Barrett five thousand dollars. Five million dollars would have been necessary if money could have helped at all.

John Barrett did not laugh. For some seconds the capitalist was silent, and Dad noticed he blinked several times, but that was the nearest he came to displaying any emotion. More to himself than to Dad he said:

"I have half a dozen friends, any one of whom is worth fifty to a hundred million, and yet at a time like this the first man to come forward with the offer of a loan is a little old sourdough from Alaska."

He got up and began pacing the floor, and Dad Simms, studying him, knew that he was looking upon a man on the verge of breaking. One man, or four, or five, could not wear Barrett down, but a pack could.

"The wolves are getting me, Dad," he confessed. "I know it, and I am beginning to think they know it. It won't happen this week, this month, or next month, but the way conditions are in the country they will just about have me hamstrung when the most critical period comes. You've seen wolves work on a caribou or moose, Dad. They never start eating their victim until they have him helpless. Well, it is the same way here!"

It was not rage or cold fury that caused the man to suddenly almost scream. It was breaking nerves, and Dad realized it.

"Why should I go on keeping wages at the old level when everybody is forcing me to sell my product at a much lower figure? Why should I?" he shouted. "What are a thousand of my employees to me, after all? What am I to them? Nothing! I have taken my loss and, by the gods, they will have to take theirs! I can't stand it, Dad! I can't stand it!"

Dad stood up and slapped him on the back.

"Hang on to yourself, kid," he said, "you can't afford to break now."

The warmth and humanness of Dad's touch seemed to have a soothing effect. Barrett threw out his hands with a gesture of helplessness.

"Just forget everything I said a moment ago. My employees are a loyal bunch. They mean a lot to me, and I feel certain that I mean something to them—something more than just the man who is providing them with a living. It's the cussed wolves that are breaking me down. Day and night, night and day, they hammer away. It can't go on forever. There is a limit to human endurance. Then after I am gone, what? Well, I know what. The wolves will have things their own way. Wages will be cut and prices will go up. Somehow, some way, they've got to get back the money they are spending to beat me. The producer and the consumer will pay the tariff."

The door opened and almost cautiously the secretary appeared.

"Sorry to disturb you, sir, but what are your wishes in the Greenwood matter?"

In short, clipped sentences John Barrett gave his instructions, and after each sentence, the secretary would bow and say, "Yes, Mr. Barrett."

As the door closed, Barrett resumed his restless pacing. Dad could not see it, nor could Barrett, but somehow both seemed to feel a ring of wolves surrounded the big man; wolves with gleaming eyes, bared fangs, and dripping jaws, ready to pounce on the victim and eat him alive, the moment one of their number had hamstrung him, and rendered him helpless.

"I get so sick of every one around me saying 'Yes, Mr. Barrett,' " the big man complained. "I would give anything if they would only say 'No, Mr. Barrett! You're dead wrong!' If they would just say it once a week, and even if they were wrong, it would be a relief." He seated himself but could not long remain in his chair. He was twisting his fingers, or crossing and recrossing his legs, or doing anything but relaxing. In the

end he shrugged his shoulders. "Dad, there is only one thing left for me to do and that is to stay right here and fight it out."

"No, Mr. Barrett! You're dead wrong!" Dad Simms said sharply.

Barrett looked startled and then commenced to laugh. "Well, I got my wish," he grimly confessed. "Somebody finally said, 'No, Mr. Barrett, you're dead wrong!' All right, Dad, now show me why I am dead wrong."

"You admit they've almost got you licked right now. What will be the situation two months from now when the big crisis comes? You'll be too weak to see it through. You know it, and I know it. So do they. Do you know what you're going to do? Well, you're going to turn this business over to some of your 'Yes' men to run, and you're going with me to Alaska."

"Impossible, Dad!"

"No," Dad retorted, "you just think that it is impossible. You admit that you haven't any fight left in you. You admit that, in another two months unless the wolves lay off you, which they won't do, you'll be licked. Then in the long run, what difference does it make whether things go to smash right now or two months from now?"

"Well, er——"

"Exactly," Dad said, with a grin. "It doesn't make any difference at all. Now, this is what we are going to do. I once heard of a fellow whose hobby was juggling rubber balls. He did it in the privacy of his office, and the day he kept seven balls in the air without dropping them was a greater day than when he made a million dollars in the stock market. Another fellow paints landscapes and stores them away in his safe; while your secret ambition is to bag the most famous bull moose on the Kenai Peninsula, the Tustumena bull."

"How did you find that out, Dad?" Barrett inquired.

"Well, when I hit this camp yesterday, I telephoned your office and they said you were at home. I suppose that was just a stall on the part of that slick secretary you have. Not being wise to the ways of business men in this camp, I sneaked out to your house, expecting to find you. Mrs. Barrett was there, and she spent a half hour telling me it was high time somebody did something about you; and when she got all through talking I said, 'Mrs. Barrett, I'm your huckleberry!'

"Then she showed me the blank wall above the fireplace in your den, and she told me that you were saving that spot for the head of the Tustumena bull. And somehow I got the idea that when the wolves gave you time you planned to go North and bag that bull moose, and that when you got him it would be just about one of the happiest moments in your life; but the trouble is, Barrett, I know the wolves of the North country, and you know the wolves on the Street, so we both know they never give a man a rest. They keep at him until either they are licked or they pull him down."

And with that Dad Simms reached over and pressed a button. A moment later the "slick secretary" appeared.

"Get out your paper and pencil, son," the old sourdough directed, "and take down what I am about to say.

"To Whom It May Concern: You are hereby notified that effective to-morrow morning the various departments of this organization will be in charge of the department heads. Each man will have full authority to operate his department as he sees fit and will be held strictly accountable for results. I am leaving on a big-game hunt in Alaska and will be gone six weeks."

"Now," said Dad, "just write that up on your typewriter and bring it in here for your boss to sign."

In somewhat of a daze the secretary departed. He was gone several moments, but by the time he returned he had recovered his usual poise. Gravely he placed the astounding notice on Bar-

rett's desk. Of course, this was merely Barrett's method of getting rid of a crazy old man. He was doubtless an Alaskan who had "missed too many boats" and was, therefore, slightly crazy. It was much better to humor crazy men than to argue with them. Viewing the matter in this light, it was but natural that the secretary was utterly astounded when Barrett reached over, picked up a fountain pen, and signed the notice with an enthusiastic flourish. There was but one answer to it all. Dad Simms was crazy, and in turn he had exposed Barrett to the germ. Now both of them were crazy.

Nor was the secretary alone in this conclusion. When the notice made its appearance on the desks of the various heads of departments that afternoon something like consternation filled each heart. The burden of responsibility, so long carried by Barrett, now rested squarely on the shoulders of the young men he had so patiently trained. Theirs was the burden, and for six long weeks, they would be unable to say, 'Yes, Mr. Barrett."

THEY gave Barrett a little dinner just before he left, and they toasted him and the Tustumena bull, and he promised to stay until he got it. The whisky was good—from the cellar of a man who had bought it twenty years before. His friends gave him everything they thought he would need. His wife packed what she considered the necessary clothing. He arrived in Seattle with five trunks; but at the hotel Dad Simms bought a steamer trunk, selected a few articles from the five trunks, and then ordered them stored in the basement.

"We are traveling light," he explained.

The Street seemed far away to Barrett when he settled down in his steamer cabin. The *Aleutian,* loaded with freight, hunters, and school-teachers, backed slowly from the slip. A friendly individual named Colfax occupied the adjoining cabin. Without introducing himself or asking Barrett his name, he handed the capitalist the morning paper.

"I see by the stock reports the wolves are snapping at Barrett's business now that his back is turned. That hunting trip, wherever it is, will cost him plenty. Personally, I hate wolves," he said.

"So do I," the capitalist answered. "I'm Barrett."

"I figured you were somebody when you came up the gangplank," the other said, extending his hand. "I am Colfax, nobody in particular."

Barrett grinned. "Well, we've one thing in common. We hate wolves. Just how much did they nick me for yesterday? Do the papers say?"

"Yes," Colfax answered. "The papers say so in dollars and cents. Do you really want to know?"

"No, I don't think he does," said Dad Simms, interrupting at that point. "Let's talk about the Tustumena bull," the old sourdough suggested. And Barrett confirmed Dad's suggestion with a nod.

Colfax shrugged his shoulders and laughed skeptically. "I wish you luck on that bull, Mr. Barrett," he said, "but a lot of good men have hunted that old boy, and yet his antlers are still smashing the brush on Kenai Peninsula. Who is your guide?"

"Well, my chief guide is Dad Simms here; but we have a number of packers and lesser guides who are to meet us on the ground."

"It looks like a pretty good set-up," Colfax observed, "and you may bag the Tustumena bull. Gosh!" he exclaimed, after a moment's reflection, "what a trophy for a man to bring out! What are you shooting?"

"I am shooting a .30-06 lever-action rifle with a 150-grain bullet."

"That will turn the trick," said Colfax.

Others mentioned the great bull moose on the way up the Inland Passage. The water, of course, was calm, and stops at various Alaskan towns varied the routine of the voyage. There was something of a blow on the Gulf of Alaska. Nearly every one but Barrett and Dad Simms went to bed. Somehow or other this pair were not the type to get seasick. There was a trapper aboard, too, who told many interesting stories, and Dad expressed the opinion that some of the stories might be true. The trapper knew all about the bull. He had seen the great animal kill another bull in combat. The antlers, he estimated, spread seventy-five inches, a record so far as he knew. There was a cablegram awaiting Barrett at Seward, a thick envelope that in view of cable rates must be important. Dad Simms took the cablegrams from Barrett's hand, opened the envelope, and read the contents. Barrett, watching narrowly, noticed the old sourdough's face fill with concern, and for once he appeared to doubt.

"Does it concern my family or business?" Barrett inquired.

"Business," Dad answered.

"I will take it," Barrett informed him. But he was not weakening. He merely folded the sheets into a small square and tucked them away safely. "Thanks, Dad, I will read it when I have completed my hunt; and don't look so worried, Dad. That cablegram probably informs me that I have lost a couple of million dollars."

"You've lost more than that," Dad blurted. "Dang those cussed wolves, anyway!"

"I suppose it is difficult for you to believe, Dad, but I have almost forgotten my business. Again and again the thought of that bull drives away thoughts of business. I worry more about the prospect of not getting him than I do over what is now happening in New York. Gosh! Suppose I failed to get him after all this! Now there is something to worry about."

It had taken a fast train nearly five days to put Barrett in Seattle. A steamship had taken six more days to thrust him on from Seattle to Seward, and the end was not yet. Another railroad carried him to Anchorage. A power boat bucked the rough tides of Cook's Inlet for eighty miles, then a power dory thrust him up to Kasilof River for eighteen miles. Then by smaller boat he moved still farther, up a lake to the base camp. From that point he would use power boat and legs—mostly legs. When the last camp lay behind, Barrett climbed a small ridge and viewed the country. His heart pounded from the effort. He breathed rather heavily.

"I am in rotten shape," he grumbled, "but say, this is a great country!"

Lake Tustumena, set like a jewel, a mighty jewel some twenty-five miles long and ten miles in width, lay before him. It was fringed by spruce and birch, studded by lofty, snow-capped mountains. There was a glacier that impressed Barrett with its cold silence and tremendous force. The roughness of the water, when the wind off the glacier whipped the lake, was a challenge to a man's daring.

"And I've always thought, back in my mind, that I was a force," he observed, "but I can't cope with this—yet." This was no admission of defeat, merely an admission that he was not yet ready to do battle. Everything had been arranged in advance, thanks to Dad Simms. There were two tents high in the mountains, containing food and bedding. Sleeping bags had been spread on bunks filled with spruce boughs, otherwise known as spruce "feathers." This was known as the Sheep Camp. There were other outposts with cached supplies when Barrett was ready to hunt brown bear and the great bull. The guide at the camp explained that the bull had not yet been located but several

men were out scouting for him. Would Mr. Barrett care to hunt sheep in the meantime?

He did not care just yet. He wanted to climb a small hill, without puffing and knowing that he had a heart because that heart pounded loudly in his ears.

TWO weeks passed. The guides loafed around and privately informed themselves that this was pretty soft. But it did not last, and when it ended they were surprised. The same tireless energy that had gone into Barrett's business now went into the business of hunting. His lungs, filled with fresh, cold air to the very depth, aided the heart. It did not pound as much. The soreness was gone from his limbs. His eye was clear, and the Street, if such a place existed, certainly could be no nearer than Mars. He saw mountain sheep through binoculars, but it was a week before he saw a ram over the sights of his rifle. There were four rams protected by outposts of ewes, and they stood looking down on an empire. The guides said they must get above them. Five hours' climbing brought them within bare shooting distance. Six bullets rattling around the rams stirred them up, but they moved on only a short distance. The quarry expected danger from below, not from above. There was another hour's crawling, with Dad Simms leading the way over narrow ledges where a slip meant sudden death. Then Barrett, aiming carefully, fired, and a ram, six hundred yards away, dropped. Luck, Barrett called it, but Dad Simms knew that the eyes, and the muscles, and the nerves were coördinating. Barrett was no longer a man who seemed on the verge of screaming, bursting out in violent cursing, or sobbing. From the tips of the ram's horns to the base it measured thirty-seven inches, and the spread was seventeen inches. They arrived at the tents at midnight. Barrett fell into his bed dead tired, but his lungs and heart had stood the gaff, so had his legs.

Morning brought a half-breed with a message. The message had spanned the continent and sea by wire and cable, then because of its importance had been hurried into this remote section by relays of runners. Again Dad Simms opened it.

Again Barrett inquired, "Business or about the family?"

Dad Simms was almost popeyed. "It's business, John," he said.

"Then we'll forget it."

Dad scratched his silver head thoughtfully.

"For once I'm beginning to weaken myself, John. Maybe you had better take a peek at this."

Barrett reached for the cablegram, folded it carefully, and placed it in the pocket with the previous message. "We'll forget it, for a while," he said. "Now let's go into the lower country and locate that bull. I am ready for him."

Dad Simms breathed more easily. "All right, we'll start in the morning."

Two days later they reached the approximate location of the moose. The camp was ready for them. Two guides and a cook were on the job. One of the guides, in a considerable state of excitement, announced that the big bull had been seen that morning.

Barrett appeared to be worried. "I wonder if I could hit that moose on the run?" he said.

"Let's find out," Dad suggested. "We need camp meat," and with that he led the capitalist over rough country for nearly a mile. A young caribou bull was stalking across the opening three hundred yards away.

"All ready," Dad said by way of warning to Barrett, and with that he jumped up and let out a yell. The caribou tossed his head in a mixture of fear and defiance, then broke into a dead run. With an easy movement Barrett

swung the rifle to his shoulder, followed the fleeing animal with the muzzle, and fired. The caribou leaped convulsively, then dropped.

"You got him right behind the shoulder," Dad cried excitedly. "The shooting skill you learned as a boy is still with you. The Tustumena bull hasn't a chance unless you get excited when you see him and blow up—as others have done."

The entire party set forth the following morning and moved slowly over the country. The guides were one on either side, with Barrett and Dad Simms in the center. The guides worked slightly ahead so as to turn the moose toward Barrett. This had the added advantage of preventing the capitalist from becoming lost. If he got off the course he was certain to pick up the guides' trail and turn back. Nothing happened until about noon, then something moved just ahead. Barrett listened and slowly there came into view a huge bull. His rifle leaped to his shoulder. His heart pounded with excitement, but even then he held his fire. Dad Simms leaned over and whispered:

"That is not the huckleberry you are after, John; the paddles of that moose are not more than sixty inches across and the Tustumena bull is supposed to have a seventy-five-inch spread."

The bull moved past, then catching the man scent rushed to the nearest thicket.

All this spoke well for the stealth of their advance. They moved ahead swiftly, the capitalist afraid that he would lose his big chance—the chance that was costing him hundreds of thousands of dollars every day that he stayed away from his office. They skirted a small lake, then paused on a ridge overlooking a moose pasture. The guides were nowhere in sight. Barrett searched the country through a pair of powerful binoculars. Abruptly a gasp of pleasure and surprise escaped his lips. He handed the binoculars over to Dad Simms.

"Train them on that clump of brush the other side of the pasture," he said.

Dad peered through the binoculars briefly, then returned them to their owner. "There," he said, in a voice filled with excitement, "is the Tustumena bull."

They marked well the spot, then began the advance, slowly making their way through a cranberry marsh. The water rose high at times, spilling over their boot tops and touching their flesh. Their hands were cold, but there was one thing in their favor. There was no coating of ice over the pools to break and crackle a warning. As they drew near the spot, their caution increased. Every move must be the right one or all that it had cost in hardship, money, and effort would be wasted. Barrett could hear his heart pounding in his ears; it was not the pounding of effort but the swift thump of excitement. The brush stirred slightly, then the great head and massive spread of antlers appeared. All that was visible was the neck, head and antlers—that portion of the moose that would go home as a trophy of this hunt and occupy the space left so many years for it on the wall of his den. But even now he held his fire, lest the heavy brush or a rock or something turn the bullet. He wanted the shoulders out in the open before he fired. The moose was tense, as if warned of danger.

"I guess I had better let him have it," Barrett whispered. "He's getting nervous."

"He's not worried about us," Dad informed the capitalist; "he's looking in another direction. Possibly he scents one of the guides. If that's the case, it will turn him this way, so be ready when he comes into the open."

But it was no man scent that held the interest of the great bull, but rather the scent of a rival. A second moose came

into the open, and briefly they eyed each other. Abruptly the silence of the moose pasture was broken by the combined roar of their rage, which filled the air as they charged. The soft movements and sounds of lesser creatures were silenced. They huddled in trees, dens, and burrows, tense, awaiting the outcome of this battle of giants.

With a thundering impact, the bulls met, head on. Heads were forced downward, and the force of momentum lifted their hind quarters into the air. Minutes passed swiftly, for man appeared to have no part in this drama. It was as old as time itself. Five minutes the battle raged, and yet to the watchers it seemed hardly five seconds. Then the attacker turned and fled, scarred by many wounds. Nor had the victor escaped untouched. The Tustumena bull continued to stand where he had fought, his wounds bleeding, his head with its mighty antlers moving slowly as if in deep thought. The spell of the conflict was still on Barrett and Dad Simms, and before either could shake off the almost hypnotic influence, the Tustumena bull turned suddenly and dived into the brush.

Barrett leaped to his feet in hot pursuit. "Could Fate be as cruel as all this?" he thought. To place the moose within range, and then cast a spell that the creature might escape. He moved on in hot pursuit, frantic lest his chance be gone forever. Legs hardened from mountain climbing, heart strong from living in the open, lungs drawing in deep drafts of cold air, he forced himself ahead at a killing pace for a half mile. The moose had moved steadily down grade, quitting the high ground of the recent battle for the low, swampy area and shallow pools of the south end of the pasture. The old sourdough came abruptly upon his friend. The capitalist was standing there, his shoulders slumped, utter dejection written on his face. Dejection, and yet not exactly defeat. He looked pretty much as Dad had seen him in his office several weeks before, unbeaten, yet weakened.

"I've lost him," he said. "He's gone into ground that I can't follow. I think he swam that pool."

"If he did," Dad said quickly. "He came out the other side. If my danged old legs will just hold out, it may not be too late."

"Dad, I'd give a million dollars in cold cash to get that moose. Oh, don't look surprised. There is more than a head involved here. Somehow, of late it seems that I haven't finished what I have started. I carry on a good fight for a time and then it seems as if I weaken at the critical moment; that I let the big chance slip through my fingers as I did just now when I had the bull in range."

Grim lines settled about Barrett's jaw, which had become leaner during these days in the open. Almost viciously he said aloud: "I've got to see this thing through, just for what it means to my life in years to come. I've got to take that bull's head home with me as a constant reminder that I overcame the greatest obstacles that Nature could put in my way. If a man can beat the obstacles of Nature, and the cunning of wild animals, then he never need fear other men."

"That's dang good logic," Dad Simms agreed.

Less than two hundred yards away, Dad Simms held up a warning hand. Almost with the warning came the cry of a moose calf. A moment later it came into the open, hotly pursued by a pair of gaunt wolves. Just as it seemed that the calf must be torn down, a cow moose, undoubtedly the calf's mother, cut in between the wolves and her offspring. The calf lumbered on, still bawling, to pass within fifty feet of the waiting men, its eyes rolling with terror, its breath coming with sobs, every muscle strained to escape.

"All this trouble was caused by the first fight," Dad Simms proceeded to hastily explain. "Both those bulls were wounded, and the blood scent carried far and brought the wolves on the run."

And now a scene was enacted that few men are given the privilege of looking upon. It stirred Dad Simms as deeply as he had ever been stirred in his life. On this unwritten code of the wilderness the base of existence was founded—a mother's defense of her young, a male's defense of his mate. Though bleeding from his previous encounter, the Tustumena bull never hesitated but thundered into the open and drove off the wolves as they were about to bring down the cow. The scent from his many wounds drove the wolves frantic. Others joined the first two, and while the cow lumbered on in quest of her calf, the pack surrounded the bull. A too-eager wolf was caught on the great spread of antlers and tossed high into the air. As the body was butted into the damp ground the bull's hoofs came down and stamped life from it. But this was no ground for successful defense, as the bull well knew. His heavier weight placed him at a disadvantage, while the wolves' lighter weight permitted them to maneuver quickly. His enraged eye glanced at the mangled form of his first victim. Then he felt fangs in his living flesh as one of the wolves tried to break the hamstring that would bring the great creature down. As the bull stumbled and fell, the cowards in the pack came from the outer ring.

"Wolves," Barrett cried furiously. "They are the same, animal or human! They attract the victim's attention in front by a mock attack, while the real onslaught comes from behind. Ah! He got another—and look! There are more coming! There he goes into the water."

With the pack at his heels, the bull had gone into the nearest pool. With hot scent in their nostrils, the ever-increasing pack swarmed after him. But now the bull had the advantage. His hoofs were on the ground, while his attackers were swimming, and therefore maneuvered more slowly. Again and again he drove the snarling creatures under the surface and held them there. The others retreated, sneaking around the pond, knowing that in time he must come forth. His courage was magnificent, an inspiration. Well he knew that to weaken meant defeat, and apparently increasing numbers held no terror for him. He continued to breathe his defiance, while with each passing minute his strength grew less from the loss of blood. The clear waters of the pond were slowly turning to crimson.

"It can't be any worse," Barrett cried almost in protest. But it could be, for the frightened calf came lumbering back, and hotly in pursuit came a lone wolf. The bawling calf was the one thing that could have lured the bull from the ground of his own choosing. As the pack brought down the calf, the bull charged full into the mêlée. Somehow the calf escaped, except for his lone pursuer, and the crack of Barrett's rifle brought that wolf down. Escape cut off from the pool, the Tustumena bull was making his final stand, while the survivors of the pack tore at his scarred sides, ready to eat him alive, the moment he was rendered helpless.

The old light of battle that knows no defeat was in Barrett's eyes. He stood with feet firmly planted as the Tustumena bull's hoofs were firmly planted, and fired shot after shot into the pack; and presently the two champions, who had each in his own way heard the cry of the pack, and felt the slash of the fangs, stood alone. There was no fear in the Tustumena bull's eyes as he looked at the man who had come so far for his head, and the eager thirst, if such it could be called, in the man's eyes was for a different sort of trophy.

Slowly the great bull turned into the pool and swam its width, leaving a crimson wake. On the far side he staggered forth and made his way to a wooded island, secure from the attacks of the enemies of his kind. Then he collapsed, to await the return of his great strength, and the healing of his many wounds.

Barrett reached into his pocket and drew forth the two cablegrams. "Five million dollars in the hole already," he said slowly, "and conditions getting worse every day. The wolves seem to scent the blood of my financial wounds. They are coming in droves."

He looked toward the Tustumena bull that had ignored numbers and odds but had fought on. Then he turned to Dad Simms.

"Come on, Dad! I am going home to see this fight through." The eyes that flashed at Dad Simms were clear. The cheeks were those of the conditioned fighter who welcomes the fray. The step was the quick step of the man of vigor.

"Come on, Dad," he repeated, "I'm going home. I've tried battling with wolves and found it sweet. I'm going back home—for more."

In Next Week's Issue of

STREET & SMITH'S Western Story Magazine

TREASURE WELL

By GEORGE OWEN BAXTER

A shepherd who could fight and wouldn't—teased and tormented until at last he did! A dark secret! A bit of luck! And, in the end, still guessing.

HOMESTEADER'S CHANCE

By RAY HUMPHREYS

A young homesteader of the West, his ambition thwarted, thinks he is going to turn crook. He meets a real crook, somebody smokes a telltale cigarette, and Fate does one of her curious twists.

Also Features by

Robert J. Horton
Max Brand
Guthrie Brown
And Others

15c A COPY AT ALL NEWS STAND

WS—9A

The Round-Up

A LADY! She's jest rid in from Ashtabula, Ohio! Folks, we take pleasure in introducing to you, as the first speaker this evening, Miss Virginia Fox. Virginia, tell 'em:

"Boss and Folks: Waal, waal, is there any room for a tenderfoot? Just rode in from Ashtabula with some of these fine authors we have in this good old Western Story Magazine. I sure do think, like all the rest of these wise guys that read this magazine, that it is the best. When you read it you want to go to the open spaces. I think all your authors are fine, but the ones I like in particular are Cherry Wilson, Max Brand, R. O. Case, and Roland Krebs. By the way, where has Roland pitched his saddle roll? His stories are excellent.

"Could any one of you waddies send a tenderfoot some Western poems and songs? And, say, your covers are swell. Three cheers for Gayle Hoskins, and a million more of the good old Western Story.

"So long, Boss and Folks."

As to old Krebsie Boy, Virginia, he's been all broke up recently on account of illness in his family. You know he does funny stuff for us, and he says he can do no other. Declares there is enough real trouble in this world of sin and sorrow without adding to it with sad stories, or stories that depress one. This bein' the case, as seems quite natural, Roland declares he jest can't do no cut-up stuff when his folks are real sick.

Well, here's hopin' they get well soon, Roland. So say we all of us!

'Nother lady, Miss Helen Breshears, Lexington, Oregon:

"Boss and Waddies: Although I am only what you would call a kid, I hope I will be allowed to put in my two cents' worth. I wonder what has happened to *Dynamite Smith, Shorty McKay,* and *Joe Cook*. I never could tell what kept the people from making *Shorty* the sheriff and *Joe Cook* the helper. But I suppose *Joe Cook* wouldn't be very much of a helper.

"Gee, Mr. A. L. Spencer sure does

think he knows everything about horses. Wonder what would happen if he got among some real, honest-to-goodness cowboys, instead of guys who think they are tough, rip-roaring cowboys. Really, Mr. Spencer, the reason you have never tamed a horse must be that a horseman is supposed to have more brains than the bronc which he is trying to tame. I wouldn't brag about the way I treated a horse, if I treated one like you say you did.

"I am a weekly reader of Western Story Magazine. I have read it ever since I have been able to read. Another of my favorite characters is *Hushabye*, also *Pard*. I wonder if *Dad Simms* will ever get married or into some sort of jam where it is his fault. I would like to hear more about his dog.

"I wonder if any one would oblige me by sending me a copy of the words of 'Little Joe, the Wrangler.'"

A gent now, a neighbor up North. Aubrey Sutton, of Meota, Saskatchewan, welcome!

"Good Boss and Folks: How's chances to say my say around the fire? Reading the arguments about how to break horses, I'd say that this idea of keeping a horse under your wing for a month or so before riding it is all bunk. I prefer to use spurs and break them as soon as they are brought in. And I'd like to say, as far as trapping coyotes is concerned, you need to use your head. The coyotes up here ain't the tame kind like some of these you read about. Hounds are used, as well as traps and poison, in this province of Saskatchewan, and other places, too, I suppose. Well, the main thing I want to say is that Street &. Smith magazines, especially Western Story Magazine, with the Round-up, cannot be beat.

"Well, next man up. So long."

Frank McCraig, Hudson County Hospital, Laurel Hill, Secaucus, New Jersey, will now most kindly lead us in song. All ready? Let her go, Frank:

"Boss and Folks: Let's see if there is room for a newcomer around the fire to-night who wishes to present a song that has been asked for more than once.

When the Bloom Is on the Sage.

To most folks there's a spot that lives forever,
Deep down within their fondest memory;
Tho' I have been a rover, I have never
Seen any place where I would rather be.

Chorus.

When it's round-up time in Texas,
And the bloom is on the sage,
Then I long to be in Texas,
Back a-ridin' on the range;
Just to smell the bacon fryin',
When it's sizzlin' in the pan,
Hear the breakfast horn, in the early morn,
Drinkin' coffee from a can;
Just a-ridin', rockin', ropin',
Poundin' leather all day long,
Just a-swayin', sweatin', swearin',
Listenin' to a cowhand's song.
How it beckons, and I reckons
I would work for any wage
To be free again, just to be again
Where the bloom is on the sage.

"I think I'll lay back now and chat with the boys up here. So long."

Well, whata-yer-know, if here isn't another lady as wants to speak. Miss Doris Soule, North Main Street, Taunton, Massachusetts, it's more than glad we all are to see yer and hear yer:

"Boss and Folks: Heave over and give a slim thirteen-year-old miss a chance to do a little praisin' of her favorites. I've ridden a long way to-night to be at this round-up.

"In my opinion, every story published in Western Story Magazine is a hit. Several of my friends, of both sexes, agree that Frank Richardson Pierce's story 'Two Wildcats' was good. But what I'm plumb bustin' to say is this: Raymond Berry is an author worthy of

high praise. His work in 'Gentler, Cowboy,' was wonderful. But what's become of Cherry Wilson? I liked all of her stories, including 'Stormy Dorn,' and 'Empty Saddles.' That sure was a great one! Max Brand, George Washington Ogden, Ward Harriman, Clem Yore, Roland Krebs, Guthrie Brown, George Cory Franklin, and some others, whom I'll mention at another meeting, are simply grand.

"I'd like to ask if any cowboy out West happens to have 'The Cowboy's Lament' and 'The Cowboy's Ballad.' If any one else has them, they might send them to me. I sure would appreciate them a lot. Now, I nearly plumb forgot to tell you that I'd also like the words to 'The Face on the Barroom Floor' and 'On the Sidewalks of New York.'

"Bet you all think I've got a plumb heck of a lot of nerve to say so much at the first meetin', but I just couldn't help it. Some day I expect to come West, and I wonder if my Western lingo'll be improved. You're going to hear a lot more from me from now on."

Missouri will now show. Elton Jacobson, 722 Harrison Street, Kansas City, next in the saddle:

"Boss and Folks: My pinto is a little winded, and I saw your camp fire, so I'll jest stop and loosen the girth and get a cup of Java; but I'll have to be on my way again soon. You see, I'm hunting a wolf that has been annoying the herd. It's a so-called Texas wolf, and it seems to be lobo. I saw him around the cavey trying to get somewhere with a mare, but he don't know the least about horses. Still he thinks he does, and if some other wolf would put a bug in his ear he'd be more careful. I don't think he ever saw a horse that was a horse. Maybe he's seen a lot of crow bait and plow nags. Well, he won't live to see another, because I am just a Kansas waddy out for a lobo, and we Kansas waddies sure hate wolves, because they're nothing but a nuisance.

"Cherry Wilson's stories are sure swell. So are George Owen Baxter's, and Frank Pierce sure knows his onions, and also the Western Story Magazine. Long may it live! It's the best little old magazine on the market to-day, and if it should quit publishing its fascinating stories, I don't know what I'd do.

"Yours for a long-time reader."

A big business man follows. He doesn't want to give his name, simply says that he is "A. J. J. of Connecticut." We are pleased that we instruct, help, and interest big business men. Frankly, we never intentionally aim at them. A. J. J. says:

"Boss: In the miscellaneous departments of Western Story I constantly find many items that are extremely interesting and beneficial. I really believe that it would be of great benefit financially if these items could be brought to the attention of more business men who are in a position financially to take advantage of the information that is set forth in Western Story Magazine."

Pretty nice, we'll say, and, as we remarked before A. J. J. spoke, we didn't know we were leading the captains of finance and industry.

AND LAST BUT NOT LEAST
the interesting cover series
appearing on
Street & Smith's
Western Story Magazine.
Come to the end of
A COWBOY'S DAY
with
Slim and Rita's Romance
Trail.

The HOLLOW TREE

Conducted by HELEN RIVERS

Miss Helen Rivers, who conducts this department, will see to it that you will be able to make friends with other readers, though thousands of miles may separate you.

If you would like a friend or friends in a certain section, write Miss Rivers to this effect, and she will put you in touch with readers who want to correspond with folks in your part of the world.

It must be understood that Miss Rivers will undertake to exchange letters only between men and men, boys and boys, women and women, girls and girls. Letters will be forwarded direct when correspondents so wish; otherwise they will be answered here. Be sure to inclose forwarding postage when sending letters through The Hollow Tree.

Address: Helen Rivers, care The Hollow Tree, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

SOUTH of the old Sioux Indian stomping grounds of the Dakotas is the Niobrara cow country of Nebraska, with the old Chisholm Trail to the southward of Ogallala.

"Tonka Kola" rode over the Chisholm Trail and punched cows in the range lands south of the Dakotas.

DEAR MISS RIVERS:

In 1876, when I was little more than out of my teens, I made several trips on the hurricane deck of a somewhat headstrong broncho via the memorable Chisholm Trail. I escorted longhorns from San Antonio, Texas, to Ogallala, Nebraska, and from Ogallala to the cow ranches up on the Niobrara River, and occasionally to the different Indian agencies beyond. We drove our herds over trackless prairies and through uncharted sand hills, with the sunrise or the evening star alone to guide us in our direction. It was a hard, strenuous life, but filled with thrills and adventure. For what with great moving herds of buffalo that would often contest the right of way with our longhorns, and the occasional brush with hostile Indian war parties, our life was pretty much of a gamble. When these great buffalo herds cut across our trail, there was a heap of hard riding to be done, I can tell you, to restore order. And when we had a brush with hostile Indians we had to be quick on the draw, for they sure would kill a cowboy whenever they got the chance. But, being quicker and much better shots, we generally got the best of it. And let me tell you that about ninety per cent of the Indians were unfriendly in those days and would steal cattle and kill whenever no one was looking.

But, folks, the thing that was most disliked by all of us was the job of going on night herd. Yes, we hated that worse than a brush with the Indians or meeting a herd of buffalo. Just imagine being in the saddle

all day and then going on night herd with the possibility of having a thunderstorm and a stampede during the night. When the first crash of lightning came, nine times out of ten that meant that the sleeping cattle would start a stampede. Then the night herder had to ride in front of them and do his level best to start the onrushing cattle to milling or moving in a circle until they got over their fright and quieted down. But, in the meantime, woe unto the cowboy if his cow pony stumbled and fell, because the frightened cattle would run right over him and trample the life out of him and his mount.

In 1877 and 1878 I rode for the different outfits in the Niobrara country, near the border of the Sioux Indian reservation of South Dakota. The Indians had a habit of rustling the ranchmen's cattle, and the government finally decided that it would be far cheaper to pay for stolen cattle than to put down an Indian war. My buddy and I were sent to the Indian villages to count stolen hides during one spring round-up. The third tepee we came to was occupied by a big, surly buck known as Standing Bear. We found him lying down on a bed of beef hides ten or twelve inches deep and covered over with a blanket. As the buck was quite determined not to get up, we promptly grabbed hold of the blanket and rolled him onto the ground. While one of us began pulling off the hides, the other made a record of the brands. But the buck suddenly jumped to his feet. Pulling his blanket up over his head, he hissed out, "My heart heap bad," and then he jumped to the other side of his tepee and grabbed up his Winchester. But one of us beat him to it, and the hide counting went on. Now, if it doesn't make any difference to you which one of us used the six-shooter, I will side-step the issue, and perhaps give you a few more incidents that happened in those days of stampedes and Indian wars. TONKA KOLA.

Care of The Tree.

And here are some folks who want your attention, too, please.

"I am just an old salt, but if any one would like to hear a few of my yarns, I am sure more than willing to swap with them. I am thirty-nine years old and have been sailing for twenty-five years, eight years of 'em in the navy. If anybody is interested, I'll try to answer all questions about life abroad and afloat. Some of the places I can sling a pen about are China, Philippines, Cape Horn, Russia, Australia, and Constantinople. And, folks, listen! I even tried to ride a bucking hoss once!" This is Carl E. Osburn, U. S. S. *Lexington,* M Division, San Pedro, California.

Wear your friend-maker badges, folks, and yarn with Tonka Kola, the old-time cowboy who rode over the Chisholm Trail and punched dogies in the Niobrara country near the Sioux Indian stomping grounds of the Dakotas.

Twenty-five cents in coin or stamps sent to the Hollow Tree Department, Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City, will bring you either the pin style or the button for the coat lapel. In ordering be sure to state which you wish.

"Folks, I live up in Canada in the Rocky Mountain trench. I don't know very much about cow-punching, nor about bucking broncs; but I would like to learn. I am eighteen, and hope to get some pen pals." This is Hilda Robinson, whose address is Box 517, Cranbrook, British Columbia, Canada.

"I am on a fox ranch and get so lonesome, folks, that I don't know what to do. Won't some one please write and give me something to think about? I'm twenty-two and will appreciate hearing from any one, anywhere," says Vera Weidman. R. F. D. 7, Waterloo, Iowa, is where she lives.

"Although so far away from the U. S. A., I feel that I know you folks through the old Hollow Tree. My favorite pastime is shooting, and I think I can interest some of you people in the wild folk around here. We have rab-

bits, foxes, wallabies, and kangaroos here aplenty. Maybe some lad on a ranch would like to hear me tell about this country. Hope so, anyway. I'm eighteen." Geoffrey Thorne lives at Drouin West, Gippsland, Victoria, Australia.

H. E. T. would like to corral some pen pals from Spain, New Mexico, Australia, and England. He'll send a big, long reply to all letters. Address him in care of The Tree.

"I was born and raised in northern California in the heart of the great redwood forest. Seven years ago, I landed in New York, and I'm here yet. But it gets mighty lonesome in this big city, folks, and I'm hankering to hear from some people in the West. And come on, you cowboys! I've busted a few broncs myself!" F. Riecke's address is 415 West Fifty-seventh Street, New York, New York.

"Perhaps you folks will allow a new hand at this racket of collecting pen pals? A good third of my life has been spent in traveling, but at last I've located here on the banks of the Mississippi. Perhaps some of you folks will be interested in the places that are for me only memories of yesterday—for my travels took me through forty of our States and into Canada, Cuba, and Mexico. So hop aboard my ship of conversational patter, folks, and I'll guarantee an answer to all your questions." R. Neal O'B.'s mail will reach him in care of The Tree.

Here's a hombre who has a leaning toward homesteading.

"Do you suppose I can annex a few pals through the old Holla? You folks from the West, especially, and I would also appreciate a few tips on homesteading. However, I'll welcome letters from any one, anywhere," says Jerry Graynor. The address is 2846 Lyndale Street, Chicago, Illinois.

The State of Washington appeals to this pal.

"I'm a longshoreman who would appreciate pals and will certainly answer every letter I get. I'm thirty-seven, am interested in outdoor sports, and like to travel. I'm interested particularly in the State of Washington, and hope to get there some day and see it for myself. I even have hopes of some day owning a little farm in Washington State, and maybe I'll look for a good, steady pard to help me through. Well, I will sure appreciate hearing from some one, and will do my best in return." This is W. W. Prince, General Delivery, San Luis Obispo, California.

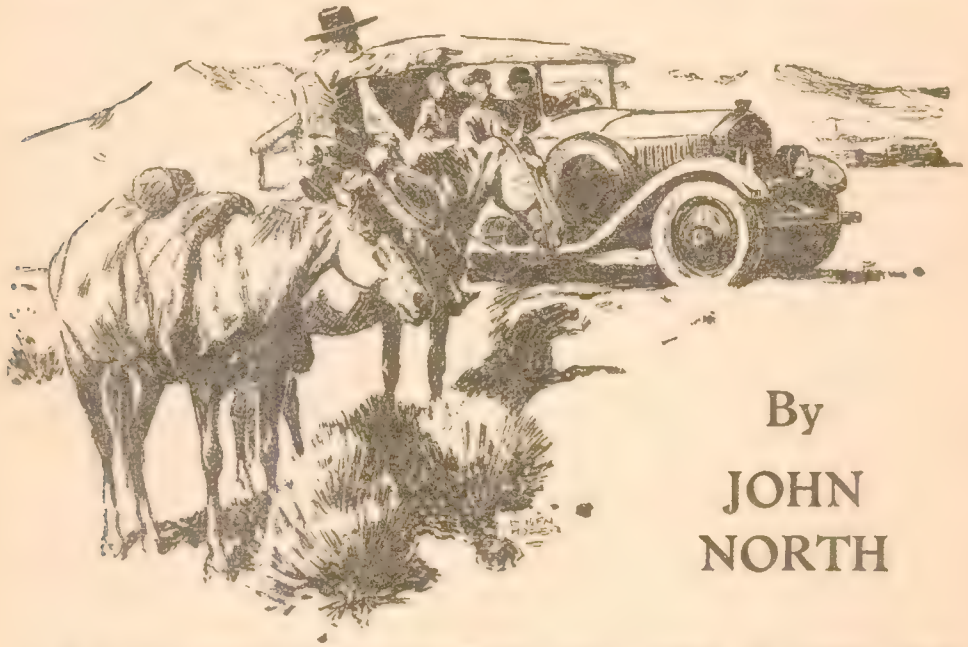
Letters from all countries are welcome.

"Folks, I'd like to see how many different countries I can get in touch with. Just get busy, wherever you are, and send along some letters, *muy pronto*. Oh, yes, and address them direct to me, please. John Kunos, 938 Grove Street, Aurora, Illinois."

An English sister craves American friends.

"Here is just another girl who has always wanted to go to America. Maybe I shall get there some time, but as I cannot go just now, I'd love to have some letters from any one who would care to write and tell me about the United States and especially about the West. As for myself, I am twenty-one, and I simply love all sports." This is Gwendoline Coles, whose address is Belmont School, Mill Hill, London, N. W. 7, England.

WHERE TO GO and How to GET THERE



By JOHN NORTH

We aim in this department to give practical help to readers. The service offered includes accurate information about the West, its ranches, mines, homestead lands, mountains and plains, as well as the facts about any feature of Western life. We will tell you also how to reach the particular place in which you are interested. Don't hesitate to write to us, for we are always glad to assist you to the best of our ability.

Address all communications to John North, care of Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

THE fertile valleys of the West, from the Willamette Valley of Oregon to the Rio Grande Valley of Texas, have always had a great appeal for our readers. Here comes a request from Don R., of Louisville, Kentucky, for information about a valley out in California, which we can't remember ever to have mentioned in this department before:

"I've heard such enticing tales about the Indian Wells Valley out in California, Mr. North, that I want to hear more, and this time from an authentic source, so I'm coming to you with some questions. Can you tell me where it is located, what its surroundings are, and its size? What is grown out there? Do the crops have to be irrigated? If so, from where does the water come and is there an adequate supply?

"As I'm not very robust physically, I'm looking for a mild climate, and would like to know if the Indian Wells Valley is a healthful place. What does land cost? What are the markets for crops? Are transportation facilities

good? Are there opportunities for fishing and hunting? And what are some of the scenic attractions near this section? As you can see from this array of questions, I'm a very thorough person and want all the facts to be had before making any definite plans."

Well, we, for one approve of thoroughness and are mighty glad to give Don all the facts in our possession about this section. The Indian Wells Valley is located out in Kern County, California. The western barrier of this region is formed by the high Sierra Nevada Range of mountains. To the north and east lie the mineralized Argus Mountains, while the El Paso Range forms the southern border. This valley is around twenty miles long northerly and southerly, and from fifteen to eighteen miles wide easterly and westerly.

SPECIAL NOTICE

TOURISTS, SPORTSMEN, AND FARMERS

Graham County, Arizona, welcomes tourists, sportsmen, and farmers. Here the lovers of the outdoor West may enjoy scenery ranging from parched desert sands to green wooded slopes. Hunting is excellent. In the mountains may be found such big game as deer and bear, while in the valleys there is an abundance of ducks, geese, and quail. And the man who tills the soil will rejoice in the fertile lands of the Gila Valley, which lies within the borders of Graham County. This section also boasts some of the largest cattle ranches in the Southwest, as well as the San Carlos Indian Reservation. For additional information about Graham County write to John North, in care of Western Story Magazine.

Don will find that the principal crop of Indian Wells Valley is alfalfa, which is cut from five to eight times each season. Owing, however, to the mild climatic conditions and wonderful sunshiny days, many crops can be successfully grown, such as cotton, Egyptian corn, barley, and wheat. Such fruits as peaches, apricots, grapes, pears, apples, and berries also flourish. Deciduous fruits ripen early and can be placed on the market from four to seven weeks ahead of those of a great many localities. All types of vegetables can be grown. Yes, the crops have to be irrigated by water raised by pumps. Both electricity and gas engines are used for power. With wells properly put down, there seems to be no question at all as to water supply.

Indian Wells Valley has long been recognized as having a most excellent all-the-year-round climate for health. The dry desert air, tempered by the trade winds, makes the curative properties of Indian Wells Valley climate unexcelled. With an elevation of from two thousand to twenty-six hundred feet above sea level, free from fogs, it is an especially beneficial locality for those afflicted with throat or pulmonary troubles. The summer days are warm, though never unbearable, and the nights comfortable.

The cost of land depends upon location and improvements. Unimproved raw land that will produce eight to fourteen tons of alfalfa per acre per year, with a water lift of forty to seventy-five feet, can be bought as low as twenty-five to fifty dollars per acre.

There are good markets for crops. Besides Los Angeles, there are the towns of Randsburg, Johannesburg, Red Mountain, and Stolia. Trona and Cartago, where millions of dollars have been invested in huge chemical plants, also offer markets for produce.

Transportation facilities are good. Indian Wells Valley is traversed by the Nevada and California branch of the Southern Pacific Railroad, with daily passenger, express, and freight service. The Midland Trail, a macadamized highway, runs through the valley, giving a paved highway direct to the Los Angeles markets, which are only one hundred and fifty miles away.

If Don is fond of fishing, he will find that a short drive will take him to the best fishing streams and lakes to be found in California. And as for hunting, one only needs to go to the canyons of the high Sierras bordering the western side of Indian Wells Valley for such big game as deer and bear.

There is no lack of scenic attractions in the vicinity, for the far-famed Red Rock Canyon with its beautiful scenery is practically the gateway to Indian Wells Valley. Coso Hot Springs, widely known for its curative properties, is but a short distance away, and Mount Whitney, the highest peak in the United States, lies northerly a little over an hour's drive.

And now we must curb our enthusiasm about this western valley. We are telling Don, however, where to write to obtain additional information and shall be glad to give the same address to any other interested readers.

Our next query comes not from a land seeker, but a prospector, for George W., of Quebec, is asking for some information about a certain mining district in western Canada.

"I'm interested in the Northern Manitoba mining district, Mr. North, and would like some information from you about it. First, can you tell me just where it is located? I'd also like to know when the first discoveries in gold and copper were made there and what has been done. Can you tell me how one gets around in that region? In fact I'd like to hear anything you have to say about this section."

The Northern Manitoba mining district, sometimes called The Pas district, commences on the Manitoba-Saskatchewan boundary about midway between the Saskatchewan and Churchill Rivers, and runs easterly for some hundred or hundred and twenty-five miles, with a breadth of fifteen to twenty-five miles.

Original discoveries of gold-bearing quartz were made about 1912 on Amisk —or Beaver—Lake, which lies just within the Saskatchewan side of the boundary line. Prince Albert interests began prospecting, and for a time, the territory was known as the Beaver Lake district. Discoveries of copper sulphides were soon made on the Manitoba side of the line, of which the most notable are the Flin Flon group of claims and the Mandy. The former are on a small lake known as Flin Flon, which is divided by the provincial boundary line. The latter is on the Schist Lake, about four miles distant.

In an easterly direction from Amisk Lake are numerous lakes which form a natural highway of travel by canoe across this district.

George will find that headquarters for this district are at The Pas on the Saskatchewan River. The westerly end of the area is reached by steamers which ply on the Saskatchewan River and Cumberland and Namew Lakes from The Pas to Sturgeon Landing. From the Landing, Athapapuskow Lake is reached by a seventeen-mile wagon road, or by a canoe route through Goose Lake. All parts of the district are from there accessible by canoe in summertime or dog team in winter. From the south of Wekusko Lake, at the easterly end of the district, an eleven-mile wagon road connects with Mile 82 on the Hudson Bay railway.

Following the copper discoveries on Flin Flon and Schist Lakes, came reports of findings of gold-bearing quartz on Wekusko Lake. Many claims were staked and developed.

GUNS AND GUNNERS

By CHARLES E. CHAPEL

Lieutenant, U. S. Marine Corps

The foremost authorities on ballistics and the principal firearms manufacturers are coöperating to make this department a success. We shall be glad to answer your questions regarding firearms of any make or age. Address your letters to Lieutenant Charles E. Chapel, care of Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

THE readers are showing so much interest in the idea of the mail matches that we are compelled to give you more details about the project. The shooters will have to furnish their own arms, ammunition, and targets, and must abide by the rules which will be announced later. In order to insure impartial justice in deciding scores, all targets will be mailed to the N. R. A. officials, who will mark the targets, tabulate scores, and announce the winners. There will be no restrictions as to age or sex. That gives Brother Ben, Sister Susan, Aunt Anna, Uncle Uriah, and Granddad Jones the same chance to win a medal and see their names published to the world in this magazine, as well as the newspapers of the country.

We are always glad to welcome police officers and sheriffs to this department.

CHIEF OF POLICE JOHN DOUGHERTY, Little Falls, New Jersey.—We are sending you the names of several rifle and pistol clubs which might wish to compete with your marksmen, and we are also requesting all of the leading firearms and ammunition manufacturers to give your department special discounts on arms and ammunition. Any readers who belong to clubs near Little Falls are requested to write to you at once to arrange matches. Let us know who

wins, chief; we're betting that your officers stay within the bull's-eye for every shot!

Here's a shotgun enthusiast from the sunny South.

Mr. Thomas D. Moore, Kitrell, North Carolina.—Your question about loading shotgun shells for your particular problem is being answered directly, but the subject is of interest to all readers. Briefly, we do not recommend reloading your own shells unless you can buy your gunpowder from a local dealer, or are reloading in large quantities. The reason for this is that the express and mail cannot carry gunpowder; it must go by freight, and you must pay for one hundred pounds whether you buy that much or not. The most complete reference on the subject is the booklet put out by the Lyman Gunsight Corporation, of Middlefield, Connecticut.

Here's a crack shot who wants information about government requirements for pistol qualification.

E. D. S., Scio, Ohio.—Slow fire, ten shots at twenty-five yards, no time limit. Rapid fire, ten shots at fifteen yards, time—eleven seconds for each five shots; ten shots at twenty-five yards, time—fifteen seconds for each five. Quick fire, fifteen shots at twenty-five yards, time—three seconds per shot. We have given the percentages in a past issue, so we shall not repeat, but will now give you the target size.

The "L" target, which is used for both slow and rapid fire with the pistol, is a rectangle six feet high and four feet wide, with a black, circular bull's-eye five inches in diameter, and seven outer rings. The bull counts as ten, and the rings have decreasing values, working outward from the center. Target "E," the quick-fire target, is a drab-colored silhouette, about the height of a man in a kneeling position, made of cardboard; it is exposed for three seconds at a time, and a hit any place on its surface counts as one point for score.

A Californian wants to know about rifle qualifications.

G. A. H., San Leandro, California:—The army "A" course requires the shooter to make a total score of three hundred and six to become "Expert Rifleman," two hundred and ninety for "Sharpshooter," and two hundred and forty for "Marksman." Target "A," the short-range target, is used for two hundred and three hundred yards; it is a rectangle six by four feet, with a ten-inch black bull's-eye with concentric rings which descend in value from the bull's-eye outward. Target "B," the mid-range target, is used at five hundred and six hundred yards; it is square, six feet on a side, with a twenty-inch bull's-eye. Target "C," the long-range target, is used at eight hundred and one thousand yards, and is a rectangle six by ten feet, with a thirty-six-inch bull's-eye. Target "D," the rapid-fire target, is six feet square, with a silhouette representing a man in the prone position. Target "L" is a six-feet-by-four rectangle, with a five-inch bull's-eye. A shot anywhere on the target counts as one point.

Here's another Westerner.

M. O. Klingman, Seattle, Washington.—The address of the secretary of the U. S. Revolver Association is: Colonel Roy D. Jones, 5 Oak Street, Springfield, Illinois.

MISSING

This department, conducted in duplicate in Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine and Detective Story Magazine, thus giving readers double service, is offered free of charge to our readers. Its purpose is to aid them in getting in touch with persons of whom they have lost track.

While it will be better to use your name in the notice, we will print your request "blind" if you prefer. In sending "blind" notices, you must, of course, give us your right name and address, so that we can forward promptly any letters that may come for you. We reserve the right to reject any notice that seems to us unsuitable. Because "copy" for a magazine must go to the printer long in advance of publication, don't expect to see your notice till a considerable time after you send it.

If it can be avoided, please do not send a "General Delivery" post-office address, for experience has proved that those persons who are not specific as to address often have mail that we send them returned to us marked "not found." It would be well, also, to notify us of any change in your address.

Now, readers, help those whose friends or relatives are missing, as you would like to be helped if you were in a similar position.

WARNING.—Do not forward money to any one who sends you a letter or telegram, asking for money "to get home," et cetera, until you are absolutely certain that the author of such telegram or letter is the person you are seeking.

Address all your communications to Missing Department, Street & Smith's Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

KENNEDY, ALBERT, and **POWER, JENNIE.**—Of New York City. Will they, or any of their relatives kindly communicate with Francis Melancon, Breaux Bridge, Louisiana.

HURSE, ANDREW.—Last heard from in Arkansas, in 1906. Left Arkansas for Oklahoma. Any information regarding him will be gratefully received by his son, Robert Hurse, care of this magazine.

WILLIAMS, MYPHREY WARREN.—Died at Grenada, Kansas, in 1881. Will children and grandchildren please communicate with W. W., care of this magazine.

SANDRES, FRANK, JOHN, and **BERTHA.**—Frank formerly lived in LeClaire, Iowa. Information appreciated by their niece, Rozella Sanders Whinnery, 907 North Fourteenth Street, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

SHIREY, GOLDIE.—Resided in Chicago, but later moved to Rockford, Illinois. Please write to A. A. H., care of this magazine.

MATTHEWS, J. W.—Left Romance, Arkansas, about fourteen years ago. Was in Vernon, Texas, when last heard from. Any information welcomed by R. E. M., care of this magazine.

ANDERSON, FRANK H.—Home was in Nebraska. Also lived in Shellsburg, Iowa, and Cedar Rapids. Was last heard from in 1917, when he was in the navy, serving on board the U. S. S. "Columbia." Please write to Mrs. Mary Tumlity Howard, 527 Quincy Street, Waterloo, Iowa.

RADMARK or **REDMARK, OLIVER.**—Last heard of in 1924, when he was at Fort McPherson, Atlanta, Georgia. News of him will be greatly appreciated by Robert Miller, Box 60, Clinton, South Carolina.

MELANSON, FRANK P.—Missing seven years. Born in New Brunswick, Canada. Sarah has passed away. Mother still waiting for you. Have information of importance. Please write to your sister, Florence Stewart, 16 Emerson Street, Wakefield, Massachusetts.

KELSCH, CARL.—Left St. Louis, Missouri, in 1925. Last heard from in Houston, Texas. Information appreciated by his brother, W. Kelsch, 848 Stannage Avenue, Albany, California.

MYRING, WILLIE B.—Was discharged from National Military Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers, in California, April 4, 1930. We are anxious to hear from you. Our letters to you were returned. Please write to your mother, Mrs. J. E. Myring, 118 West 111th Street, Roseland Station, Chicago, Illinois.

MORRISON, HUGH or **HARRY H.,** and sister **FANNIE.**—Will any relatives of these parties kindly communicate with Clarice Morrision, 136 McAllister Street, San Francisco, California.

STEINBACH, GEORGE W.—Was in Greeley, Colorado, in spring of 1927. Have important information for him. Will any one knowing his present address kindly notify his friend, A. E Streiff, 1519 Forty-third Avenue, San Francisco, California.

FOBERT, DOROTHY YOUNG.—Have pleasant news for you. Please send your address to A. E. Cooke, 1519 Forty-third Avenue, San Francisco, California.

MASON, ROY WALDO.—Attended Stanford University. Any information regarding him will be welcomed by A. E. Cooke, 1519 Forty-third Avenue, San Francisco, California.

HERRON, JOHN M.—Please write or come home. Your mother needs you. Mr. Mary A. Herron, 16255 Tuller Avenue, Detroit, Michigan.

BEATRICE.—In the December 13, 1924, issue of this magazine, you asked J. Holt to wire you. The J. Holt you were trying to locate may be the same one I know. If you are still interested, write to A. H., care of this magazine.

TURNER, NELLIE.—Lived in Greenville, Texas, thirty-five years ago. Later married, but I do not know husband's name. She knew me as Miss Rena. Information appreciated by Mrs. B. J. Patterson (formerly Miss Rhoena Morris), Pecos Drug Company, Pecos, New Mexico.

GAMILL, ORIS.—Five feet five inches tall, dark hair, light complexion. Was in Medicine Lodge, Kansas, two years ago. Any news of him will be very much appreciated by his mother, Mrs. C. T. Gamill, 512 West Moore Street, Henryetta, Oklahoma.

GRAND, MADALINE.—Formerly of Chicago, Illinois. Missing for the last two years. Mother is very ill, and constantly calls for you. We love you and need you. Your little boy is back from Greece, and is with Dan. Please come back to us, write or wire. Your sister, Elsie Milburn, 1026 North College Avenue, No. 26, Indianapolis, Indiana.

STANLEY.—You are forgiven. Please write to your father, J. H., at the same address, Seattle, Washington.

CLARKE, JOHN.—Between twenty-four and twenty-eight years old. Please write to your friend at Box 434, Schofield Barracks, Honolulu, Hawaii.

CUMMINGS, EDMUND PAUL.—Last heard of in Stockton, California, in August, 1930. Five feet five and one half inches tall, blue eyes, brown hair. Twenty-four years old. Please write to father and mother, at 358 East Fourteenth Street, Elmira, New York.

ATTENTION.—Would like to hear from buddies who served in the 168th Infantry Supply Company, Forty-second Division, during the World War. Please address John Beamis, 863 East Leafland Avenue, Decatur, Illinois.

GALLAGHER.—My father, B. Gallagher, a structural-iron worker, was killed in a fall in St. Louis, Missouri, about the years 1885 or 1886. My mother died three days after I was born. Will any relatives of my father or mother kindly communicate with B. Gallagher, 6159 Sangamon Street, Chicago, Illinois.

LESLIE, JOHN.—Has light-red hair, is five feet eleven inches tall, and weighs about one hundred and sixty-five pounds. Last heard from in St. Paul, Minnesota, about three years ago. Please address any information regarding him to Joe Bultena, R. F. D. No. 5, Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

TOLIVER, FRANK.—About twenty-three years old. Last heard from in South Bend, Oregon, in 1929. Any news of him will be greatly appreciated by Doris from Ohio, care of this magazine.

ASHLEY, WILLIAM (BILL) H.—Left home August 26, 1928. Was last seen in Detroit, Michigan, in 1929. Has also lived in Topeka, Kansas, and near the Mexican border, under various names, such as Jack Ashley, W. H. Warner, Gardiner, and Smith. He is sixty-nine years old, five feet nine inches tall, weighs about one hundred and eighty pounds, has blue eyes and gray hair. Will any one having information about him, kindly write to his wife, Mrs. W. H. Ashley, Croswell, Michigan.

PETTY, HARRY H.—Formerly crew manager for Peet Brothers Soap Company, Kansas City, Missouri. Information appreciated by Rosa E. Ostrander, Box 33, Austin, Minnesota.

KAY, ROY.—Please write to New Yorkers, care of this magazine.

HULSE, ESTER.—At one time lived in Butte, Montana. Also resided in Seattle, Bellingham, and Yakima, Washington. Worked as telephone operator. Any word regarding her present whereabouts will be welcomed by C. A. Richter, B. M., 2 c, U. S. S. "Hannibal," care of Postmaster, New York, New York.

KINETZKY, MORRIS.—Cigar manufacturer. Formerly of Chicago, Illinois. Last heard of there in 1911. He is fifty-eight years old. Kindly address any information concerning him to I. A., care of this magazine.

LEGG, GEORGE WILLIAM.—Last heard from in Sumner, Washington, in 1928. Twenty-five years old, five feet six inches tall, has black hair and gray eyes. Please let me know if you are well, and why you did not answer my letters or sign the papers I sent you. Everything has changed, but I would like to be your friend. Write to O. M., 838 H. North Central Avenue, Phoenix, Arizona.

SENETTE, WESLEY ALBERT.—Last heard of in Franklin, Louisiana, about 1916 or 1917. Married a Miss M. Simms. Information appreciated by Wesley A. Senette, 1215 Kerlerec Street, New Orleans, Louisiana.

SPRINGER.—Edward Springer, if living, would be about eighty-four years old. Left Pennsylvania for Oklahoma about the year 1885. Believed to have worked mines or oil fields. Would like to hear from him, or any of his children, who are thought to be living in Indiana. Would also appreciate word from Esther Springer, of Indiana. Please address Charlie Springer, Route 1, Box 56, Folsom, West Virginia.

ROCHESTER, CLARENCE.—Last heard from in Ohio. Information appreciated by his daughter, Barbara Rochester, 327 West Twenty-eighth Street, Houston Heights, Texas.

MILES, CARLTON.—Twenty-five years old. Weighs about one hundred and thirty-five pounds, about five feet ten inches tall, dark eyes, and thin, dark hair over a high forehead. Has a crooked finger, stiff and small at the tip. Slight scar on upper lip, and one on right temple. Rather talkative, and a little hard of hearing. Interested in machine shops and garages. Any information regarding his whereabouts will be deeply appreciated by his mother, Mrs. D. B. Miles, R. F. D. 8, Bonifay, Florida.

HUMPHREY, FRANCES.—Of Sedalia, Missouri. A daughter was born to her March 26, 1911, and was adopted in August of the same year by Edward and Eliza Cook, of Rockport, Missouri. This daughter is now anxious to locate her mother, or persons who knew her. Kindly forward any information to Mrs. F. Clifford, 215 Buchanan Street, Morris, Illinois.

QUINN, ANNIE, nee **CANNING.**—My cousin. Will she, her children, or any other relatives, kindly write to John McCastney, 7 Carrickhill Place, Belfast, Ireland.

LEWIS or **EDMONDS, MARY,** and son **TOM.**—Last heard from Oklahoma, about 1917. Were leaving for Kansas. Please write to your niece, Alice Shaw, R. F. D. 2, Box 223, Beaverton, Michigan.

MACK, GRACIE.—Was in Waukesha, Wisconsin, in 1914. Later went to Topeka, Kansas. Please write to your friend, Mrs. Alice Shaw, R. F. D. 2, Box 223, Beaverton, Michigan.

ROGERS, HARRY.—Believed to be in Manitoba, Canada. Was adopted by a family named Worbey or Worby. His brother Jack, who left home at the age of fourteen, would like to hear from him. Important news awaits him. Information appreciated by Jack Rogers, care of Elzear Bigue, 58 Elm Street, Winooski, Vermont.

LISEMORE, WESTON.—About forty-four years old. Last heard from in San Diego, California, in 1913. Word from him, or about him, would be greatly appreciated by an old Texas friend. Please address F. C., care of this magazine.

MELVIN, GROVER C.—Last heard of near Portland, Oregon, in 1919. Have good news. Communicate with me, or your old friend, Lottie Banks, now of Seattle, Washington. L. W. Laughlin, 645 Thirty-ninth Street, Des Moines, Iowa.

KELLEGHER, FRANK B.—Lived in Iowa about 1915. I have news of great importance to him or his heirs. Please write to L. W. Laughlin, care of L. H. Laughlin, Sharp Building, Lincoln, Nebraska.

REYNOLDS, KEITH.—Formerly lived in or near Des Moines, Iowa. Please communicate with me regarding a matter of importance. L. W. Laughlin, 1426 South Fifteenth Street, Lincoln, Nebraska.

SHEEHY, LESSIE A.—Last heard of in New York City. Formerly lived in Iowa, Tennessee, and Chicago, Illinois. It will be to her advantage to communicate with Weldon Laughlin, 1426 South Fifteenth Street, Lincoln, Nebraska.

CUMMINS, WILLIAM E.—Is believed to have lived in Iowa from 1918 to 1920. News of importance awaits him. Information appreciated by L. W. Laughlin, Sharp Building, Lincoln, Nebraska.

RACE, JAMES A., MARGARET, MABEL, and **DAISY BILL.**—Please communicate with me regarding a matter of considerable interest to you. L. W. Laughlin, Sharp Building, Lincoln, Nebraska.

TRINNIMAN, DOLLIE; PARTEET, JENNIE; KLENGENSMITH, NORMAN W.—Lived near St. Louis, Missouri, in 1912. Kindly communicate with me concerning an important matter. L. W. Laughlin, 645 Thirty-ninth Street, Des Moines, Iowa.

RICHARDSON, JOHN.—Twenty-six years old. About six feet one inch tall. Weighs one hundred and ninety-eight pounds. Has dark-red hair. Last heard of in December, 1926. At that time he was working as a barber in Huntington, Virginia. Will any one knowing his present whereabouts kindly notify his brother, Leo Richardson, care of this magazine.

RICHARDSON, WILLIAM.—William Richardson died in 1923, at Pontiac, Illinois, where he had been working as a cook. He left a wife and two little girls, believed to be living in Pontiac at present. The girls would be about nineteen and twenty-one years old. Any one knowing this family will do a great favor by advising Leo Richardson, care of this magazine.

COOK, STELLA.—About eighteen years old. Blue or brown eyes, and black hair. Lived in Hastings, Nebraska, in 1922. Her father ran a grocery store, and lived in back of it, on the first street west of the Alcott School. Information appreciated by F. G. Emerson, 1012 South Lawrence Street, Wichita, Kansas.

HANLEY or **ALLEN, LEON.**—Left home August 28, 1917, and was last heard of in California. We want you to let us know if you are well, and if you intend to come back to us. Please write to Blanche, Laurette, and Laurent Hanley, 171 Creek Side Street, Hull, Quebec, Canada.

LAWSON, H. V.—A minister. Preached at Church of God, Bridgeport, Illinois, in 1924. Walks with a limp. Has three children—two girls and one boy. Any information concerning him will be welcomed by friends. Please address Box 762, Route 7, Wellston, Missouri.

CLARK, EDWARD.—Son of Luther and Annie Clark. Formerly lived at Bridgeport, Illinois. Later moved to State of Washington. His address would be greatly appreciated by a schoolmate. Kindly address Fred, care of this magazine.

EDWARDS, JOHN.—Brother of the late George Edwards, of Brynmawr Bree, South Wales, England, and of the late Tom Edwards, of Africa. John was last heard of in Indiana, in 1910. Any word regarding his present whereabouts will be welcomed by William George Edwards, Rows Street, Murwillumbah, Tweed River, New South Wales, Australia.

LONG, CARL EDGAR.—Last heard from in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. He is about five feet nine inches tall, slender, forty-two years old, and has dark hair and blue eyes. His mother is greatly worried about him, and would appreciate any word from him, or regarding him. Please address Mrs. May Warden, care of George Fetter, Atalissa, Iowa.

BARBIS, ANDREW.—Was in Des Moines, Iowa, five years ago. Please write to your daughter, Marcella Barbis, care of Otto Moe, Lanesboro, Minnesota.

JOHNSON, PAUL WARREN.—Native of North Carolina. Left home in April, 1931. Please come home. I need you, Paul, and I am praying and waiting for you. L. J., 817 Washington Street, Hoboken, New Jersey.

SMITH, FLOYD and **LLOYD.**—Twins. Last known address was 3911 Washington Avenue, St. Louis, Missouri. Any news regarding them will be very much appreciated by Mr. and Mrs. Mickey Smith, 4000 Prospect Avenue, Kansas City, Missouri.

GLOSEK, MARION.—Has not been heard of for about eleven years. Please forward any word concerning her to Mary, care of this magazine.

BAUMGARTNER, ARTHUR.—Lived for several years in the vicinity of Hutchinson, Kansas. Was last heard of in 1928-29, when he was in Ulysses, Pennsylvania. Has friends or relatives living in Nebraska. An old buddy would welcome any information. Kindly address L. A. Rericker, care of Frank Bishop, R. F. D. 2, Ulysses, Potter County, Pennsylvania.

NUNN, JOHN.—Last heard from in October, 1930, in Louisiana. Will any one knowing his present whereabouts kindly get in touch with his sister, Grace Nunn, Ingleside Route, Newport, Arkansas.

TRANK.—Lexia and Marion always ask for you. I have been very ill, and have no money left. Still staying at 193. Please come home, or write to Mrs. Trank, care of this magazine.

DALTON, JACK.—Twenty-eight years old. Six feet tall, brown curly hair, blue eyes. Has not been heard from since July, 1929. He was formerly a forest ranger in the State of Washington. Please address any information regarding him to Winifred Teschler, 451 West Ninety-second Street, Los Angeles, California.

ABLE, RAY.—Last seen in Portland, Oregon. Will you please write to the friend who left you in Portland the night you cut and broke your hand? Have news of interest to you Address C. A. M., are of this magazine.

MacNAMARA, JOHN J.—Formerly an officer in the regular army. Originally came from New York. Would appreciate information relative to his whereabouts. Please write to E. P. S., care of this magazine.

PALMER, MRS.—Was nurse at St. Elizabeth's Hospital, in Covington, Kentucky, last winter. She previously lived in Texas. A former patient would welcome any information regarding her. Kindly address Bessie Murray, 213 Walnut Street, Newport, Kentucky.

BREWER, CHARLIE and **ISAAC.**—Sons of Isaac Brewer, who married Rebecca Bohaman, my mother. When last heard from my half brothers were in Coal Hill, Arkansas. They would now be about fifty and sixty-five years old, respectively. Will any one having information about them kindly notify Mrs. Martha Brown, care of D. Pierce, Bear Creek, Wyoming.

BARKER, LEE.—Between forty and forty-five years old. Last heard of in Los Angeles, California. Has several brothers and sisters. The eldest son of his brother Wesley, now residing in Dublin, Texas, would appreciate any news regarding his uncle. Please address J. L. Barker, Route 3, Olton, Texas.

KEARNEY, BRIDGET.—About five feet tall, dark hair, fair complexion. Generally works in private homes as waitress, with her friend, Mary Murphy. Believed to be in New York State. Her brother is anxiously awaiting word from her. Will any one knowing her present address kindly communicate with C. Kearney, P. O. Box 190, Stamford, Connecticut.

HOLCOMB, ROY BASIL.—Last heard from in Chicago, Illinois. Please come home at once, or write to your mother, Mrs. Ardie Morris, Whitman, West Virginia.

KENNEDY, JOE and **ANNE.**—J. Kennedy, who left Lowell and Boston, Massachusetts, about seventeen years ago, would very much like to hear from you. Please write to J. Kennedy, care of this magazine.

TROUTFORD, COPELAND.—About five feet eight inches tall, weighs one hundred and sixty-five pounds, light hair, fair complexion, blue eyes. Worked mostly in lumber camps. Served in army during World War. His mother is very anxious to hear from him, or from persons having information about him. Kindly address Mrs. Prudence Troutford, care of Mrs. Gordon Hill, Bayfield, Wisconsin.

HENRY.—Please write to Ma, care of this magazine.

DAVIS, MARGUERITE.—Last heard from in Borger, Texas. Later was supposed to have moved to Pampa, Texas. Information will be appreciated by Anxious Pal, 740 Dwyer Avenue, Raton, New Mexico.

BYRD.—Would like to hear from the relatives of Teddy Byrd. Will his mother, brother Robert, sisters Alice and Katy May, or half brothers, Paul and Chester (Cutter), who live near Waco, Texas, kindly communicate with me at once, very important. Mrs. Dolly Byrd, Box 265, Portal, North Dakota.

QUEEN, ROSA LEE.—When last heard from she lived in Neadrick, Oklahoma. Her mother's name was Effie Queen, and her sister was called Louise. Information will be greatly appreciated by her friend, Mary Estelle Rasor, now Mrs. Dee Cole, Olney, Texas.

BOB B.—Remember the tire shop on Third Avenue at Eleventh Street? Please write to Firman, care of this magazine.

HODGES, LESTER.—Left home in August, 1928. Five feet six inches tall, dark hair, blue eyes, twenty-one years old. His father has passed away. Any information gratefully received by his mother, Mrs. Maude Hodges, Penfil Apartments, No. C 3, Lansing, Michigan.

WHYTE, GEORGE.—Last heard of in Lumber City, Georgia. Any word regarding his whereabouts will be appreciated by Desmond Whyte, Gilbert Plains, Manitoba, Canada.

JOHNSON, MRS. W. F.—Important news. Please write to X., care of this magazine.

BRIGHT, ANDREW (JACK).—About twenty-seven years old. He formerly lived with his grandmother, in Phoenix, Arizona, but when she died in 1909, he was adopted by an elderly couple, who took him to Los Angeles, California. Any information regarding his present whereabouts will be appreciated by his aunt, Lelia Bright, Route 9, Box 2427, Sacramento, California.

SINCLAIR, ORVILLE G.—Printer. Member of I. T. U. Last heard of in New York City, in 1928. His mother is broken-hearted, and asks that any one having information about him communicate with Josephine Sinclair, 219 Geneva Street, Huntington Beach, California.

HEMMAR, S. LOUIS.—Missing for several months. Have important news for you. You need not come home, but please write to Margie, 453 South Border Street, Hot Springs, Arkansas.

LITTLE, JACK.—Could never forget you. Please write to Ada M., 706 Coburn Street, Akron, Ohio.

DAY, STANLEY E.—Was in the United States marine corps during 1924-25, serving on board the U. S. S. "Texan." Please write to your old shipmate, Private Earnest Hendrix, First O. Squadron, Mitchel Field, Long Island, New York.

WILSON, OVEL C., or his brother **JOE.**—Last heard from at Winnett, Montana, in 1922. Please get in touch with your old pal, I. M. H., care of this magazine.

WHITMAN.—My great-grandfather, Adam Whitman, left Perry County, Alabama, in 1851. Any information regarding his relatives or their descendants will be very much appreciated by Fren B. Whitman, Star Route, Merryville, Louisiana.

MILLIGAN, WILLIAM (BILL).—Came from Texas, and has relatives there. Worked in Treadwell, Alaska, in 1913. Prospected with me in 1914. Entered army in 1917. Served three years in Fourteenth Infantry. Reenlisted in another regiment. Served in Army of Occupation for fourteen months. Worked in various States until 1926. Last heard from in Roosevelt, Arizona, in 1926. At that time he intended to leave for Alaska very shortly. He had injured his hand and was being treated at a hospital, but said the injury was not serious. He never arrived in Alaska. The post office at Roosevelt has no record of him. He is about forty-six years old, five feet nine inches tall, weighs about one hundred and sixty pounds, has ruddy complexion and reddish hair. Any word regarding him will be welcomed by his old friend, H. Lester Kink, P. O. Box 431, Douglas, Alaska.

BAIRD, ALBERT and **MYRTIE.**—Last heard from in Silsbee, Texas, in June, 1922. Their eldest son is named Ellis. Any information regarding their present whereabouts will be gratefully received by Mrs. Baird's niece, Inez, care of this magazine.

MOORE, JAMES MONROE and **LILY.**—My mother's brother and sister-in-law. They were in Pineland, Texas, in 1922. News regarding them will be appreciated by Inez, care of this magazine.

DAD, MOTHER, ROYAL, or **EVA.**—Please get in touch with me at once. Am so lonely, and have tried every way to locate you. Crystal, care of this magazine.

WEBB, GEORGE.—Was in Denver, Colorado, in 1930. He is twenty-five years old, and weighs about one hundred and thirty-five pounds. Your true friend, who saw you last in Colorado Springs, would like to hear from you. Please address W., care of this magazine.

GRISDALE, ARTHUR.—Professor. Died in California several years ago. Will his relatives, or any persons who were acquainted with him, kindly communicate with C. R. A., care of this magazine.

DANN, F. E. or **BIRTIE.**—My father. Would be about forty-seven years old. Left us seventeen years ago. Any information whatsoever regarding him will be deeply appreciated by his daughter. Mrs. Ellen Jones, Appleton, Arkansas.

BLACK, MATHEW.—Son of S. J. Black. His home was formerly in Christian County, Missouri. His sister, who has had no word from him for about twenty-five years, would appreciate any information. Kindly address Mrs. Della Moody, Route 1, Box 11, Monett, Missouri.

WRIGHT and **DODSON.**—Will members of these families, resident in Kentucky, Virginia, and West Virginia, kindly communicate with Sergeant Jesse Wright, Service Company, Thirty-fourth Infantry, United States Army, Fort Eustis, Virginia.

WILLIAMS, JOHN SAMUEL.—Born in Danville, Virginia, thirty-five years ago. Adopted from Richmond, Virginia, by a farmer living in Maryland. Any word regarding his present whereabouts will be greatly appreciated by his sister, Mrs. William Dickson, Greenville, Delaware.

FLETCHER, THOMAS CLINGMAN.—My uncle. Has been missing for a number of years. Kindly forward any information regarding him to Mrs. Grace Smathers, Route 1, Canton, North Carolina.

MORRIS, LEE, JASPER, JAMES, and **JACK.**—Brothers. Lee Morris was in New Mexico, when last heard from. Any information appreciated by their sister Janie. Please write to Mrs. S. J. King, Olney, Texas.

BROCK, ELLA, and **FOWLER, LUCY TEXAS.**—My sisters, whose maiden name was Morris. Ella formerly lived near Taylor, Texas, and Lucy was in northern Oklahoma when last heard from. Word regarding their present whereabouts will be very much appreciated by Mrs. S. J. King, Olney, Texas.

COX, PEGGY.—Married name unknown. Last heard of in Eugene and Portland, Oregon. Your friend, Peggy, of 777 and N. B., would love to hear from you and your mother. Please write to Peggy Lee, care of this magazine.

HIGGINS, ELLIS.—Was in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1926. He is about fifty-nine years of age, five feet six inches tall, weighs one hundred and fifty pounds, and has gray hair. Information appreciated by his son, Robert Higgins, 3445 Clinton Street, Bellaire, Ohio.

C. ISABEL B.—Please write to me, and inclose a photo of yourself and Patricia. I still love, in spite of what any one does or says. Hope you have forgiven me. Address W. R. B., care of this magazine.

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